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A Survey of Religion, Culture, and Public Life

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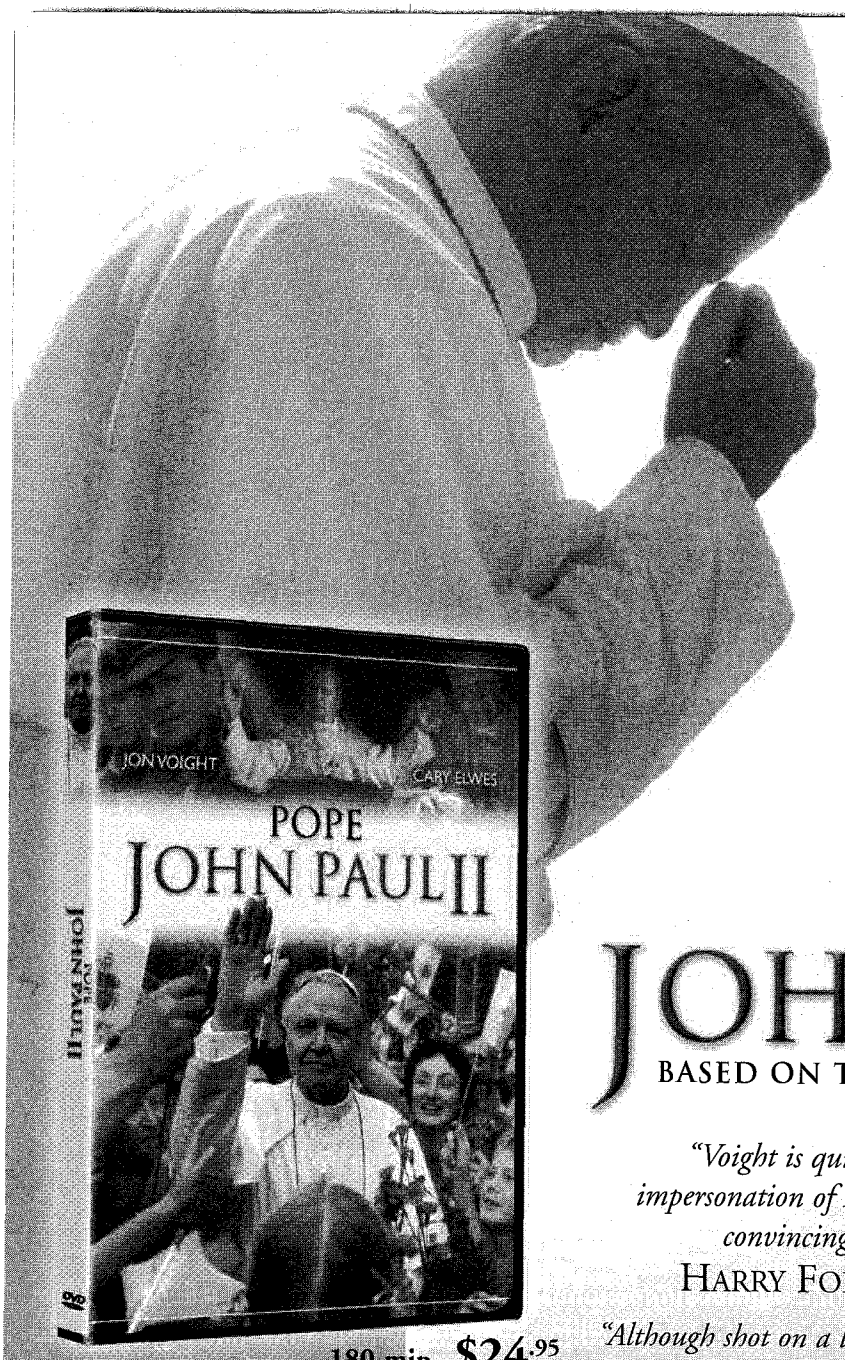

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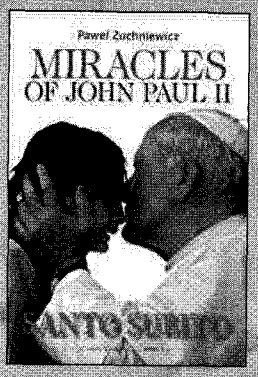

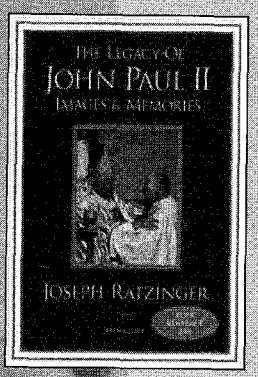

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FIRST THINGS

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Fostering Care

I read with great interest Gregory Popcak's "Misplacing Children" (June/July). As the father of four adopted children and as a leader of an adoption ministry at our local evangelical church, adoption occupies a central place in the life of our family.

I, too, am saddened by the decision of Massachusetts to force the hand of Catholic Charities of Boston regarding its adoption placement practices. As a general matter, I do not believe it is appropriate for the government to force a child-placement agency to provide adoption services to gay and lesbian couples when to do so would violate its long-standing moral and religious beliefs. And given the significant number of religious organizations that provide child-placement services in the United States, and the fact that a great many of these organizations hold similar views with respect to the appropriateness of adoptions by gay and lesbian couples, I fear that, if the laws of Massachusetts were to be taken up by a large number of other states, potentially dozens, if not hundreds, of child-placement agencies could be negatively affected.

Although I generally agree with Popcak, I think that he commits two serious errors. First, and most important, contrary to Popcak's supposed facts, there *is* a crisis in America concerning children who are waiting for permanent, loving homes and will in all likelihood never find them. According to recent statistics, an estimated 20,000 to 30,000 children (out of more than 500,000 children in the U.S. foster-care system) "age out" of foster care each year. Many of these children age out because they are considered "hard to place" with an adoptive family due to their age, race, and challenges they present (often as a result of past abuse, rejection, or neglect). Because these children never had the chance to experience the love and permanency of a healthy family during their most formative years, the results for them are all too often very bleak. The statistics regarding the extreme rates of homelessness, unemployment, and crime related to this population are truly heartbreaking.

With this in mind, it is difficult to understand how Popcak arrives at his conclusion that there are more than enough potential adoptive families to go around. Possibly he mistakenly included many adoption applications that are filed for international adoptions (nearly 23,000 in the United States in 2005) in the statistics used to arrive at his conclusion. But regardless, the unfortunate reality is that there are not enough potential adoptive homes to go around—not for the millions of orphans around the world and not for many orphans and at-risk children right here in America. In fact, there are currently more than 120,000 children in the U.S. foster-care system who are awaiting adoption, and only about 20 percent of those children are in pre-adoptive homes. Thus, it is not an "unlikely event," but rather the very real fact, that there are not currently enough married, heterosexual couples waiting to adopt a great many of these children, and in particular the "hard to place" children.

Second, Popcak ends his article by pointing to the Church's insistence "that all children, especially adoptive children, deserve a mother *and* a father." I believe I understand well the point he is attempting to make: A mother and a father are God's ideal design. But we live in a broken and imperfect world, and I am afraid that this statement backhands many godly

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single men and women who have responded to God's call to adopt a child, even though God has not yet brought into their life a marriage partner (i.e., in the context of a Christian, heterosexual marriage).

Thus, it appears here that, as I see all too frequently, Popcak's conclusion conflates, albeit possibly unintentionally, the issue of singles adopting with the issue of gays and lesbians seeking to adopt. I know from many involved in our adoption ministry how hurtful and difficult that association is for them. Thus, I hope and pray that, even as we resist certain trends in adoption, we do not become overbroad in our indictments.

Michael Monroe
Coppell, Texas

Even gay activists should affirm that, other factors being equal, orphans should be placed with parents who share their sexual orientation. That way, the children will have supportive role models for their own sexuality. That is, supporters of gay adoption should agree with the Church's 2003 document (quoted in "Misplacing Children") that "the absence of sexual complementarity in [homosexual] unions creates obstacles" in the development of heterosexual children—though they would surely add that a similar obstacle is placed in the way of gay children placed with non-gay parents.

We cannot at present determine the future sexual orientation of young children in order to know with certainty how best to place them. Furthermore, we all agree that at least 90 percent will turn out to be heterosexual (since the maximum claim activists have put forward is that 10 percent of the population is homosexual). We thus know that in every case where a child is placed with a homosexual couple, there is at least a 90 percent chance that the placement is wrong in terms of sexual role-modeling, while in every case where a child is placed with a heterosexual couple, there is at least a 90 percent chance that it is right. Those who put the interests of the child first, even in Massachusetts, ought to agree on a strong prima facie preference for heterosexual over homosexual adoption.

Richard Stith
Valparaiso School of Law
Valparaiso, Indiana

Gregory K. Popcak replies:

I would like to thank Richard Stith and Michael Monroe for their responses. I would especially like to thank Mr. Monroe for his charitable criticism and for his work with children and families.

Like Monroe, I also have a personal stake in this question, both as an adoptive father and as someone who has been involved in foster care and adoption since childhood. Further, in my professional life as a family counselor with a specialty in attachment issues, I regularly consult with parents about post-adoptive adjustment, so I am aware of the struggles faced by adoptive parents and children.

I agree there are more children waiting for homes than there are homes available. As Monroe notes, this is especially true of older children and children with disabilities. My point was to note that there is less disparity between the numbers of waiting children and the numbers of waiting parents than is popularly believed.

I also agree that, as a practical matter, almost any home is better than an institution for raising children. But unlike Monroe, I do believe—and social-science data agree—that all children *do* deserve a mother and a father, not just children who live in an ideal world. It is wrong to place single parents and non-married parents (whether straight or gay) on par with stable, heterosexual, married adoptive parents. Currently, antidiscrimination policies in the United States mean that everyone, regardless of marital status, waits in the same line. This is not in the best interest of waiting children. Because of the basic right of every child to have both a mother and a father, single parents and others should be considered—if at all—only if other, married adoptive parents are not available.

According to the 2005 report *Listening to Parents: Overcoming the Barriers to the Adoption of Children from Foster Care,* produced by the liberal Evan Donaldson Adoption Institute, the answer to the adoption crisis is *not* to recruit more parents. It is to fix the system. According to their study, prospective parents are discouraged by their contact with child-welfare agencies. They are not given the information and support they need to stick with their desire to adopt, and byzantine paperwork processes and bureaucratic hurdles force prospective parents out of the system. Every year, 240,000 parents inquire about adoption—more than enough to meet the need. But only a small fraction follow through, and the reason is that they are not given adequate information and support.

Instead of merely slapping a Band-Aid on the myriad problems in the U.S. adoption system by opening up adoption to any adult regardless of marital status, we must focus our energy on four things. First, we must do more to make adoption attractive and possible for married couples through public education, even better tax incentives, and a streamlined adoption process. Second, adoption agencies must stop sacrificing children to politically correct concerns about placing children of color with Caucasian parents. It is ridiculous that adoption agencies would, with one hand, bar the door to white parents who are willing to adopt children of color, and on the other hand advocate for the rights of homosexual partners to adopt. Third, the foster system must be empowered to be more aggressive in identifying children who are appropriate for adoption earlier. Fourth, more must be done to protect the rights of adoptive

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parents against birth parents who change their minds after the fact. While it does not happen nearly as often as people imagine, U.S. adoption suffers from the not unfounded perception that adoptive parents have second-rate legal status.

Monroe notes the prevalence of international adoption. As one who is familiar with both domestic and international adoption, I can tell you the two reasons international adoptive parents note for pursuing this more expensive and more time-consuming option: They were discouraged by U.S. adoption agencies from adopting at all, much more so from adopting children of a different race than themselves, and they are terrified that they would have to give their baby back to birth parents who had a change of heart. Caucasian parents pursuing international adoption are only too willing to adopt African, Asian, and Hispanic children—*even when these children have special needs*—when they are not discouraged from doing so and when they know their rights will be protected by international adoption laws, which are more favorable to adoptive parents than U.S. adoption laws.

There are many problems with the adoption system in the United States. These problems prevent waiting children from finding stable, loving homes. Instead of inventing new crises that further sap the scarce resources of an already strained foster-care and adoption system, our energy should be directed toward solving those problems and empowering child-welfare agencies to do the job they were created to do. Children deserve better.

Religious Disagreements

Paul Johnson's essay "The Almost-Chosen People" (June/July) reminds us of the central role played by religion in American history. However, in describing the relationship of religious pluralism to religious freedom in the development of the American republic, Johnson conflates religiosity with religious pluralism and thereby presents an incomplete tale. Missing is any serious mention of the religious persecution that marked not just the Thirteen Colonies but also the United States.

For instance, Johnson overstates the case about the frontier circumstances of the American colonies when he states that "dissenters merely moved on." As evidence, he cites Roger Williams' founding of Providence, Rhode Island, as if this incident marked a high point in religious liberty. Williams did not simply "move on," as if one day he decided to found his own colony and gathered his things and calmly left Puritan Massachusetts. Rather, he was threatened with deportation, dodged arrest, and fled in fear of his life. Only then did he found "the first commonwealth in modern history to make religious freedom . . . the principle of its existence."

More glaring is Johnson's assertion that in the nineteenth century "Catholics were able to accept the public school system . . . because the concept of libertarian plurality in religion coincided exactly with their interests." In the 1840s, Bible reading and prayer were mandated in most of America's public schools. When Catholics sought the liberty to read the Douay-Rheims Bible, rather than the King James, and to pray their version of the Lord's Prayer, rather than the Protestant one, they were accused by influential Protestant politicians and preachers of seeking to ban the Bible. Catholics responded by founding their own school system as an alternative to the public one they viewed as Protestant, and in New York they even sought public tax money to fund them. To say that American public schools "never became . . . a source of conflict" is inaccurate and ignores the violence of the 1830s and 1840s rooted in the school controversies, such as a mob attack in 1834 on the Ursuline convent school in Charlestown, Massachusetts, and the pair of deadly riots ten years later in which two Catholic churches and an Irish neighborhood were put to the torch in Philadelphia. To argue that religious pluralism inexorably led to the dilution of the schools' "generalized Protestantism" avoids the sad truth of how that dilution came about. In the name of religious liberty, Catholics and Jews unhappily resorted to participating in the movement to secularize our nation's public schools.

Religion was indeed "central and organic" to the development of the U.S. government, as Johnson says. But so, too, was conflict—sometimes violent conflict—in the name of religious liberty and sectarianism. This discord should not be forgotten even when we rightly praise America's current status as "the citadel of voluntary religion."

John C. Pinheiro
Aquinas College
Grand Rapids, Michigan

Paul Johnson persuasively defends a proposition with which no secularist would argue: namely, that America is a religious society. Johnson fails, however, to address what secularists defend: that American government, as distinct from the society which gave birth to it and which it continues to serve, should be and was intended to be secular.

He does this by (1) all but ignoring the Constitution, which does not mention religion or God, except to ensure free exercise and disestablishment; and (2) overemphasizing the influence of the Great Awakening on the framers of American government and underemphasizing the influence of the Enlightenment.

While it is true the Declaration of Independence cites a "Creator" as endowing men with unalienable rights, the Constitution—the legal document that determines our government—does no such thing. The

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Constitution avoids any reference to a higher power, referencing only "We the People of the United States." Johnson ignores any discussion of the First Amendment. The establishment clause is the touchstone of the secularist position. Any argument against the secularist position which does not directly address the establishment clause is at best incomplete.

While Johnson is correct that American society was more influenced by Jonathan Edwards and George Whitefield than by John Locke and Moses Mendelssohn, the framers were not. I would be deeply impressed if Johnson could demonstrate that Madison, as principal author of the Constitution, was influenced by Edwards in any but the most opaque sense, and even more impressed if he could demonstrate that Madison was not deeply influenced by Locke's *Letter Concerning Toleration.* The framers, as men of wealth and privilege, were strongly influenced by the European Enlightenment. It would be as implausible to deny this as it would be to deny that America is a religious society.

Johnson is at his best as a historian when he examines the lives of presidents and other politicians who were both deeply religious and used religious rhetoric in their official capacities. But even here his work serves only to illustrate that politicians do not always take the establishment clause as seriously as they should. I agree with Johnson that "the strength of religion in America sustains and nurtures democracy." But religion does this, as Tocqueville pointed out, not as an authority in alignment with the government but as an authority that challenges the government. Religion is a robust and independent source of moral and intellectual life for millions of Americans precisely because it is divorced from government—precisely because our government is secular.

Matthew A. Smith
Castle Rock, Colorado

Immigration Education

Mary Ann Glendon's "Principled Immigration" (June/July) deserves much praise for pointing out the obvious: Immigration is needed in light of the dearth of children and workers; it has a negative impact on the wages of unskilled laborers; and, when it is not legal, undermines respect for the rule of law. Regrettably, she tells less than half the story.

I am a legal immigrant who came penniless to this country and who sent my children to the public schools. In the past fifteen years, I have seen my home community of Framingham, Massachusetts, deteriorate as a result of the failure of the political process and the rush of illegal immigrants. As an academic economist, I believe that I can explain the forces that are driving our country into disaster.

The dearth of children is far more than a symptom of a "deeper crisis in beliefs and attitudes," as she claims. Children have always substituted for income insurance against an uncertain future. When the government guarantees income in old age, a major reason for procreation disappears—everyone can depend on "the children of others" for the income transfers they will get in their retirement years. The problem then becomes that everyone has fewer children, generating fewer workers.

In addition, immigration "solves" two problems that require other solutions. First, as our educational system at the lower grade levels deteriorates, there is the need to bring in highly trained students from abroad to populate our universities' science and engineering programs and to staff the high-skilled jobs that allow us to compete in the global economy. There are two drawbacks to this solution: We are draining the less-developed countries of their most talented students and workers, and we fail to address our educational problems, allowing the educational bureaucracy to institute low standards and mediocrity in our public schools.

Second, illegal immigration helps to destroy accountability in the political process. When state and local politicians engage in perverse economic and social policies, citizens vote with their feet. This behavior used to force politicians to reassess their policies. But now politicians can counteract this by drawing into their communities illegal immigrants who depend for their well-being upon the politicians. It will not matter if the bad policies lead to lower income, for that income will still be higher than that found in the home countries of the illegal immigrants. To make matters worse, bad policies and increased illegal immigration serve to justify additional taxation.

I suspect that Glendon, like many readers of your journal, is protected from the consequences that I have described: They earn substantial salaries from nonprofit organizations, live in protected neighborhoods, and are too old to have children in the public schools (if they ever sent their children to public schools!). No wonder they can demand rights for so-called undocumented workers and write about principled immigration, as these things have very little impact upon their lives.

Nicolás Sánchez
College of the Holy Cross
Worchester, Massachusetts

I write from the border and have a family history here beginning in 1886, when my Italian great-grandparents purchased a ranch near Naco, Arizona. Since that beginning, my family has lived, worked, and married cross-border for six generations. At present, all my grandchildren are half Hispanic and all my children and many nieces and nephews are bilingual and bicultural, and many live right on the border. Many in the family are Mexican nationals or are second generation. I think it is fair to say that we know the border in our bones.

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First, it would seem that Mary Ann Glendon buys into the common assumption of the need for immigrants as replacement workers, citing as a basis the current 2.08 babies per woman in America. But that figure, as she herself states, is almost the replacement rate of 2.1 babies per woman. In addition, there is a baby boom even among college-educated nonimmigrants. Standing on statistics alone, our situation does not seem dire, especially if the politicians will quit raiding the Social Security system. In addition, allowing Mexican immigrants to come in will not in my experience change that demographic. Rather, the Mexican immigrants will begin very quickly to contracept and then to abort at the same or higher rate as American women. So it seems the net result will be more of the same: a need for more and more immigrants to take care of a graying population, only now composed of more and more people from Mexico, in turn necessitating more and more low-paid immigrant workers, to the destruction of our culture.

Glendon compares the current opposition to illegal immigration with the objections to the immigrants of the past. I must disagree with her. The situations are much different. I have lived long enough to have experienced the immigrants of the early twentieth century—Irish, Italian, and Mexican—with those of this era. The attitude of current Mexican immigrants is quite different from the immigrants of a few years back. One example of this is the rampant idea, promulgated by Mexican talk shows and activists both north and south of the border, that says the Southwest was stolen from Mexico and they have a right, even a duty, to take it back. We never heard that years ago, but we certainly do now, and it is promoting a hatred of America that just did not exist until recently. The sense of entitlement to social services and education is a phenomenon commented on by everyone I know in those fields. Many of those commenting are Mexican, and they do so with a sense of shame for their fellow Hispanics who are coming illegally.

In 2004, the Holy Father said "building conditions of peace means being committed to safeguarding, first of all, *the right not to emigrate*" (italics in original). He says that more equitable trade and supportive international cooperation will allow countries to guarantee their own people their basic human rights. Fixing the economies of third-world countries should indeed be our first priority.

Promoting more immigration and amnesty is not truly promoting the common good. It is helping the greedy corporate interests in America to gut the Mexican family and destroy its beautiful culture. At the same time, it helps to impoverish further the American lower and middle class, and all of this with the help of the bishops, church bureaucrats, and pandering politicians.

Our first line of attack to solve both illegal immigration and excessive legal immigration must focus on true justice and peace, helping third-world countries come into their own, to preserve their families and their culture, and to become equal trading partners in the world economy.

Ann Hardesty Howard
Tucson, Arizona

I am an admirer of Mary Ann Glendon. She has contributed some fine writing to First Things over the years. In "Principled Immigration," however, Glendon has failed to measure up to her usual high standards.

She apparently doesn't consider the millions of people who don't share her values, or who don't share the values that are presently expressed in our social-welfare system. She writes as if these values are eternal laws that cannot be either questioned or amended by legislation.

Precisely what incentive will our newly imported immigrants, numbering in the tens of millions, have to mortgage their best years supporting elderly boomers in their retirement years through bloated Medicare and Social Security programs? Glendon offers no clue. She assumes they will buy into our social contract, a social contract to which they have not been a party. This assumption probably derives from Glendon's belief that we have assembled the best of all possible worlds, and third-world immigrants, realizing this, won't take any action to disassemble it.

This is the typical American liberal notion that we are invulnerable and can't possibly lose it all, no matter who or how many we invite willy-nilly into citizenship.

I think Glendon should consider her assumption of invulnerability, which borders on hubris, or what a Christian calls "tempting God."

Mark Dykstra
Sarasota, Florida

Mary Ann Glendon replies:

I must say I was surprised at the positions attributed to me by the three readers who wrote to comment on my immigration article. All three criticize my article for what they seem to think is my acceptance of our dysfunctional social-welfare system in its present state. But none of them engages my point that, whatever one thinks of the social-welfare system, the country is heading for a financial crisis as the active labor force declines in proportion to the size of the dependent population. No serious economist disagrees with that proposition. The question is what do we do about it, and what role does immigration play.

Ms. Howard takes me to task for likening the present situation to past immigrations, but in fact I devoted much of my article to distinguishing them, and to explaining why our current situation poses more-difficult problems. I agree with Howard's emphasis on the importance of strengthening the economies of countries of out-migration; that is why I

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cited with approval the U.S. and Mexican bishops who placed that point first on their list of principles. Buried in Dr. Sánchez's fulminations is a good point about the free-rider problem, but his reasoning would emerge more clearly if not mired in ressentiment.

From the letters it might appear that I had given little consideration in my article to the legitimate concerns that many Americans have about large-scale immigration. That, as I hope First Things readers will recall, is not the case. The point of the article is that, in a debate presently dominated by immigration alarmists and pro-immigration advocates, we need full and better-informed public discussion of the human and economic costs and benefits of migration with a view toward devising effective strategies to minimize the former and maximize the latter.

The Real Islam

Cardinal Pell's article ("Islam and Us," June/July) correctly outlines some of the serious difficulties facing anyone who wishes to confront the history of relations between Muslims and Christians. It is true that there are many, both Christians and Muslims, who emphasize the positive in the hope that precedents can be found on which to build a future together. Yet, if we are to be successful, this worthy goal cannot overlook the real roots of religious intolerance in Islam. It is to the cardinal's credit that he insists these issues be discussed frankly.

Moreover, he understands that any such discussion must confront the traditional notion that the proof of the truth of Islam can be found both in its early phenomenal military expansion and in the claimed perfection of the Qur'an. The first of these has historically been used by Muslims to justify the creation and control of Islamic territory, the *Dar al-Islam*, defined and regulated by sharia. Traditionalists have argued that the power and success of the great Islamic empires could have been accomplished only through the help of God. As a consequence, few Muslims today see any real contradiction between military activities and the correct interpretation of the Qur'an. The questions raised within the Muslim community about military action are more concerned with the "innocence" of the victims of war than with any justification of violence.

I would argue that recognition of this fact is of special importance to those informed by Christian values who attempt to understand Islam. The Western tendency of late has been to associate authentic religious expression with, among other things, peace and tolerance. The vast majority of Muslims, on the contrary, identify it solely with submission (*islam*) to the commands of the Qur'an. Gaining territorial control through military means in order to promote conversion to Islam has been the primary way it has spread from its inception and is widely accepted today as legitimate.

The second facet of the traditional proof for Islam has been the immutability and perfection of the Qur'an, which is believed to have been received through the Angel Gabriel without human influence. The result is that it can and must be read literally by believers. Even among the most liberal of Muslims, this is the first tenet of belief. As a consequence, there has been almost no interest within the Muslim community in the historical-critical questions that could be raised about the Qur'an and early traditions surrounding Muhammad. Of particular concern to non-Muslims are the verses authorizing intolerance and inequality toward nonbelievers.

The reference to the work of the pseudonymous Christoph Luxenberg is a good example of the problem. Luxenberg's work is a thinly veiled attempt to argue that the entire foundation of Islam is a hoax. Although he accurately points to the relationship between pre-Islamic Arabic and Syriac, he speculates wildly about the implications of this, all the while rejecting any other evidence, including the numerous traditions that contradict his hypothesis. To my knowledge, no serious scholar has accepted any of his theory. It is therefore of extremely doubtful value for the scholarly investigation into the history of Muslim-Christian relations. Indeed, raising it is akin, within a Christian context, to encouraging historical-criticism of the Bible by calling upon the irresponsible musings of the Jesus Seminar.

There are, to be sure, many difficulties to overcome before Muslims and Christians can truly live peacefully together. Nevertheless, the Church must act in the hope that this search can be done with honesty, integrity, and respect on both sides.

Sandra Toenies Keating
Providence College
Providence, Rhode Island

I read the article by George Cardinal Pell entitled "Islam and Us" with much dismay. Cardinal Pell may be a churchman and primate, but he is clearly no great student of Islam or the history of Muslim societies. His reading of the Qur'an is at best naive.

Any accurate reading of the Qur'an takes place within the Muslim community, whose understandings and interpretations shape the way it is received by the reader. So it is precisely the nature of that community today, and its interpretations, that is relevant—not Cardinal Pell's self-serving selection of commentators. His reading of history is likewise selective and thus skewed, although in the end it amounts to mere polemic, since he cites no sources. In any case, he commits the sin of judging a religion by selective instances of the behavior of its adherents. If we go down that road, his own religion, then, is one of the most frightening in human history, for it has not only

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served up portions of violence and oppression equal to any offered by Islam, but has done so from a position of considerably more power than the Muslim community ever held.

His concern for freedom of expression in Islam is hypocritical, coming as it does from the leader of a church that, in living memory, has excommunicated those who have challenged its dogma and punishes those who defy its ban on all public discussion on issues of women's ordination and a married priesthood.

Robert Hunt
Perkins School of Theology
Southern Methodist University

Cardinal Pell's article might have been more accurately entitled "Islam or Us." Against naïfs who thought that the Islamic world was just a misunderstood pacifist colony, Pell proves that light on dialogue and heavy on sword strokes is the original Islamic way. Here he is at his strongest and most incisive: If the Prophet himself was so apt to war, then why should we expect his followers to be peaceniks?

And yet His Eminence generously hopes that Muslims will choose peace. Here I fail to follow. He has just shown that peaceful suras in the Qur'an definitively gave way to warmongering verses as soon as Muhammad could field an army. Islam in its final form is thus innately hostile to the infidel (as history has borne out), and so peace with Muslims can only be had if they betray or truncate their own revelation.

This means that we "infidels" could never hope for peace with orthodox Muslims but only with their heretics and apostates. The attempt to make Islam "moderate" will really be the attempt to pit Muslims against their own tradition in order to keep them sedate. This time, we won't send them Richard the Lionheart on a warhorse but the Islamic equivalents of Hans Küng in a Trojan horse.

Apart from being a vulgar expedient, might this not also backfire? In turning Muslims against jihad and sharia and toward peace and democracy, we turn them against their own religion. If we do this through making them Christian, it is a work of evangelization. If not, it is one of secularization. The former is praiseworthy, but since the latter would make Muslims peaceful only by rendering them godless, it is depraved. Who wants to turn the Middle East into another Holland? But I think what we are waiting for is Islam to find another, doubtless very different, St. Francis.

David Elliot
Toronto School of Theology
Toronto, Canada

Just War Not Done Justice

Richard John Neuhaus' distorted comments (Public Square, August/September) on my March *Christianity Today* interview are both inaccurate and confused.

First, without any basis in my comments, he claims that I implied "moral symmetry between Israelis and Palestinians." He then characterizes my invented position as "deeply confused," "culpable ignorance or deliberate mendacity." A little more honesty on his part would be welcome. Absolutely nothing in my comments speak of moral symmetry. To say, as I do, that the killing on both sides should stop; that there should be two fair, just states; and that one thousand nonviolent peacekeepers throughout the West Bank would help move us toward a solution to this terrible problem is not to argue for moral symmetry.

His final comment denouncing theology professors who urge young people to risk death is astonishing in its confusion. Surely every just-war professor does that. It is precisely the task of Christian ethicists, using great care to be sure, to encourage Christians to oppose evil even at the risk of death.

If that is unseemly or immoral, then everything First Things does encouraging Christians to engage in just war is wrongheaded. I would have expected a little more logical consistency from First Things.

Finally, he totally ignores my basic point—namely, that neither pacifists nor just-war folk have explored adequately the full possibilities of nonviolent intervention to combat violence and promote peace using the techniques of Gandhi and King. Why not engage the heart of my concern?

Ronald J. Sider
Palmer Seminary
Eastern University
St. Davids, Pennsylvania

RJN replies:

Of course, the possibilities of nonviolent intervention should be explored, although, admittedly, I am more skeptical than Ronald Sider about the limits of those possibilities. It is true that "moral symmetry" is my term, not his. But to speak of "the killing on both sides" as though the reasons for the killing are equivalent is to obscure the crucial moral difference between those who would destroy and those who would defend the State of Israel. Further, in just-war doctrine there is the crucial question of "legitimate authority," which the state has and professors do not have in urging young people to risk death in the service of their goals. The phrase "to oppose evil," if it means that attacking Israel and defending Israel are the same evil, brings us back to the question of moral symmetry. Thus Sider's original statement, like his letter, overlooks two critical components in just-war doctrine: just cause and legitimate authority.

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Opinion

Barbara Pym's Affectionate Irony

Betty Smartt Carter

By the time I came of reading age—old enough to pass the portals of the library's "youth department"—the 1960s were past. I'd missed the cultural upheaval, but our family bookshelves told tales of surrender. Paperback copies of *Catch-22* and *The Naked Ape* crouched like gargoyles among leather-bound Victorian classics; Charlotte Brontë rubbed shoulders with Kurt Vonnegut and Truman Capote.

It wasn't clear how or when the gargoyles had made their way in among the saints, but, as I read through our library, I realized that books themselves must have changed dramatically since my grandparents wrote their names in the covers of *Robinson Crusoe* and *Lay of the Last Minstrel*. The newer books in our house—the psychedelic paperbacks with covers that shouted A HUNDRED THOUSAND COPIES SOLD! or NOW A MAJOR MOTION PICTURE!—all belonged to my teenage siblings. Nobody made books for "old" people anymore, that was obvious, and it never occurred to me that the situation might be unfair, even when my mother complained that she couldn't find anything decent to read.

Some of this may help explain the story of the British writer Barbara Pym. I discovered Pym in my sophomore year of college, thanks to a friend who gave me her 1958 novel, *A Glass of Blessings*. I loved the book for its understated humor, the way its heroine, Wilmet, mocks her own lack of direction as she drifts through a world divided into church jumble sales, dull sherry parties, and a secret crush on a man who turns out to have a live-in "friend" named Keith. Though the copy was a reprint, I still thought we'd stumbled onto some lost treasure, a forgotten library gem. Soon enough I realized that what I'd stumbled onto was a gigantic literary bandwagon. In 1985, *everybody* seemed to be reading Barbara Pym, though she herself had been dead for several years.

Of course, people had different reactions to her. There were readers like me who became annoyingly obsessed with her novels; even our vocabulary reflected it. Whatever slang we'd been speaking before Barbara Pym, we quit using it and started tossing around tweedy words like *unpleasantness* and *cloakroom*. Against the advice of our teachers, we took to using the pronoun *one* as in "One regrets the unpleasantness in the cloakroom." Less-besotted readers enjoyed Barbara Pym but lumped her in with Miss Read and other writers of "gentle fiction," a condescending term if there ever was one.

Still others couldn't see any attraction at all in Pym's stories about women who dote on men and men who accept feminine devotion as their due. They considered her work depressing (men, she said herself, often found it so), uneventful, or simply shallow. A professor of mine said that he found her fiction (he'd read only one novel) "nothing but fluff." How, he asked, could John Updike have praised her so highly?

For me, the most difficult criticism to answer is that Pym is thematically shallow. Some of this impression comes from her published diaries and letters, *A Very Private Eye*, organized posthumously by her sister and literary executor. The collection, read from beginning to end, reveals a complicated, perceptive woman who grew enormously over a lifetime. It remains, however, the *young* Barbara who speaks first and leaves the most lasting impression: a giddy Oxford co-ed with a passion for "our greater English poets" and a greater passion for beautiful young men. The most consistent object of her affection was Henry Harvey, a medievalist who ran with an intellectual set, including the future literary critic Robert Liddell. Henry was prickly and difficult, but as an intermittent Lothario he had a druglike effect on poor Barbara. She couldn't seem to get free of him.

It's hard, from Pym's own writings, to get a clear picture of this off-kilter romance. (Plenty of readers have tried to picture it, especially the scene in the diaries where Robert Liddell caught the two of them "reading *Samson Agonistes* in bed with nothing on.") Fortunately—and I think this answers the charge of shallowness—Pym was already learning in youth to turn her personal pain to comedy, usually in inverse proportion. Her answer to Henry Harvey's disregard for her was to write a "Pymified" version of the affair in *Some Tame Gazelle*, with Harvey cast as an unlikely archdeacon and herself as his middle-aged spinster-devotee Belinda Bede: "Belinda was trying hard to concentrate on her sins, but somehow the atmosphere was not very suitable this morning and she was at last forced to give it up. Staring at the Archdeacon's back, she reflected that he was still very handsome. Perhaps he would read aloud to them when he came to supper tonight, though, as she would be the only person who wanted to listen, it might be rather difficult to arrange.... By the time the

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Archdeacon had ascended the pulpit steps, Belinda had . . . settled herself comfortably in her pew, as did the rest of the congregation, having just sung with great vigor that the world was very evil."

Though she wrote *Some Tame Gazelle* around 1935, in her early twenties, Pym wasn't able to publish it until much later, in 1950. So much had changed for her by then. She had endured a series of unsuccessful romances, served as a wartime censor, become a more regular churchgoer, and taken a job in London as an editor for the journal *Africa* at the International African Institute. It's hard to say which of these experiences had the strongest influence on her next five novels, the group Robert Liddell referred to as her "canon." Pym's gift was literary alchemy: a way of combining the most unlikely characters (vicars, anthropologists, masculine charmers, spinsters) into a unified and evenly textured world. The catalyst for it all was her own affectionate brand of irony, the balance of an extremely compassionate nature with a dangerously sharp insight into human behavior.

Excellent Women appeared in 1952, followed by *Jane and Prudence*, *Less than Angels*, *A Glass of Blessings*, and *No Fond Return of Love*. These novels of the 1950s (she finished the last by 1960) all share some elements: the distinctive Pym irony, the landscape of London with its crowded lunchrooms and crippled churches, and her recognizable character types. Some of these types include the "splendid" women who know how to deal with life's pivotal events: "birth, marriage, death, the successful jumble sale, the garden fete spoiled by bad weather." Or the maddeningly or perhaps endearingly vain men, whether priests or anthropologists, who imagine that any woman should be glad to do their laundry and proofread their manuscripts.

Of course, the world changed a lot between 1950 and 1960, and, as much as possible without compromising her style, Pym tried to reflect those changes. Though she continued to write about church life, her heroines lived increasingly on the fringes of Anglicanism, sometimes indifferent to religion, sometimes marveling that their lives should be so split between parish teas and sherry parties. After *No Fond Return of Love*, Pym fully expected to publish her next novel, *An Unsuitable Attachment*, which centered on an old-fashioned woman in her thirties who falls in love with a younger man outside her own class. The book was hardly a paean to the "good old days," being set in a tumbledown neighborhood with a parish church full of African immigrants. Still, the class-as-a-barrier-to-romance conflict may have seemed anachronistic or tame to the editors at Jonathan Cape, who were by then swept up in the new wave of shock fiction. In 1963, they rejected *An Unsuitable Attachment* with the dismissive words "in present condition we could not sell a sufficient number of copies to cover costs, let alone make any profit."

Sixteen years of relative silence followed the publication of *No Fond Return of Love*. Pym grieved during that time but didn't stop writing. "Novel reading is a kind of pleasure," she wrote to Henry Harvey, "even if nothing comes of it in worldly terms." For all that her books didn't fit the new template of popular fiction, her novels continued to sell, and loyal readers asked for more. One of these readers was the poet Philip Larkin, who began corresponding with her in 1961 and continually expressed dismay that literature was so much at the mercy of market forces: "It seems such a sad state of affairs if such tender, perceptive and intelligent work can't see the light, just because it won't 'go' in America, or some tasteless chump thinks it won't 'go' in paperback."

Larkin never stopped encouraging Pym. In 1977, he finally had the opportunity to wield some influence in the public, naming her "most underrated novelist of the century" in a *Times Literary Supplement* survey. (Pym was the only living author to receive two nominations; the other came from a long-time fan, Lord David Cecil.) In the last three years of her life, she saw her fortunes restored and redoubled: She published two new novels, received a Booker Prize nomination for *Quartet in Autumn*, and was even the subject of a BBC program, *Tea with Miss Pym*. The one dark spot in her Job-like recovery was her worsening health. She finally succumbed to abdominal cancer in 1980, with her last novel just completed.

Pym's popularity spread to the United States, beyond her first audience (people who remembered World War II) to the baby boomers. It even spread to me, studying at an evangelical college in northern Illinois. As I read her, I felt that my own world, with its parallel ranks of academics and clerics, its dedicated missionaries and career virgins, had more in common with Barbara Pym's England than it did with America of the 1980s.

So what would happen if I wrote about *my world* in her voice, her style? As she might say, "An attempt was made." To fulfill a class assignment, I dramatized an actual Sunday dinner at the home of a professor, couching the dialogue in thick irony and trying my best to sound Pymish with lines such as "The sight of the Greek professor with his beard and thick glasses made them thankful for their major, health, which they knew was a refuge from large reading assignments and teachers with wide vocabularies." The story failed, of

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course, not only because of my artificial style but because evangelical culture—with its earnest moral consciousness, its emphasis on personal scrutiny—doesn't make an ideal vehicle for affectionate irony.

I think that my failure to Pymify earnest evangelicals relates to Pym's own failure to find a publisher in the equally earnest 1960s. For all their apparent licentiousness, those years had an evangelical quality of their own, a dogmatic insistence that what everybody needed was to think deeply yet also monolithically about everything. Affectionate irony, as light as it seems, requires rebellion against orthodoxies of perception and feeling. The stronger our passion about a subject, the more disturbing the call for laughter.

In the mid-1960s, even while she tried to publish *An Unsuitable Attachment*, Pym finished a strange novel called *The Sweet Dove Died.* It was the story of a woman in love with a much younger, homosexual man, based on her own infatuation with an antiques salesman who enjoyed her attention for a while and then "offloaded her," as she put it. The pattern was familiar, but her increasing age and recent disappointments had made the circumstances especially humiliating. As so often before, she chose to fictionalize her pain. For the first time, though, she offered it up without the relief of inverse comedy. Yes, she maintained her cool, old-fashioned tone—a sort of sepia tone, like black-and-white television on a color set—but she also introduced a new measure of realism, with a manipulative but pathetic heroine and a believably blank hero. When the book finally came out, contemporary critics lauded it.

This is the novel I heard an English professor describe as "fluff." Reading it among her bright, confident novels of the 1950s, one must agree—almost. If *The Sweet Dove Died* now seems spiritless and timid, we must forgive Pym and put the blame on the publishing fashion she was trying so hard to accommodate. As in her failed romances, Pym's literary trouble lay in trying to please men (in this case, publishers) who were looking for something else. "I get moments of gloom and pessimism," she wrote, "when it seems as if nobody could ever like my kind of writing again."

Actually, there were still plenty of people around who could "like" Pym's writing. After the famous *TLS* survey, angst-weary readers came out in droves to greet her resurrected novels. The 1980s made her a literary sensation. Now, a quarter century later, Pym's popularity remains as high as ever, while her reputation has steadily grown among critics.

For me, raised on the dreary fiction of the 1960s and 1970s, Barbara Pym's affectionate irony was a revolution of its own. Though I never successfully applied it to my own writing, it colored the way I looked at life, helping me find a way out of personal pain, or at least giving me hints of a way. Now I see less comedy and more essential sadness in even the brightest of her novels—a feminine longing that underlies all the jokes about dutiful women, charming but vain men, tribalized anthropologists, high-minded priests. I also see the strengthening effects of love and forgiveness upon comedy. If the literary archdeacons of her time couldn't appreciate it, well . . . one *does* see the irony in that.

Betty Smartt Carter is the author of two novels, including I Read It in the Wordless Book, *and a memoir,* Home Is Always the Place You Just Left.

America in the European Mind

Thomas Albert Howard

In recent years, there's been no shortage of commentary on European anti-Americanism and the divide between Americans and Europeans on a number of issues—religion, most of all.

The reasons for such a divide are complex and tied both to history and to how we think about history. For Americans, our national story is intimately connected to tales of devout, beleaguered Europeans leaving the Old World for religious freedom. It's a story in which prominent Catholics, such as Jacques Maritain and John Courtney Murray, have pointed to the American experiment as a means of helping the Catholic Church, roiled by the militant anticlericalism of post-1789 Europe, come to regard liberal democracy and religious freedom in a positive light.

In short, the story we often tell about ourselves suggests a measure of European sympathy for the American experiment. But another distinctly European "narrative construction" of America in general, and American religious life in particular, deserves more attention. It is well-developed, laden with invocatory power, and familiar to Europe's knowledge classes, not to mention to what the sociologist Peter Berger calls America's own "Europeanized intelligentsia." Attentiveness to this narrative provides a more nuanced understanding of contemporary anti-Americanism.

Intrinsic to this second narrative is the assumption that America's early experiment in voluntary religion constitutes a worrisome special path to modernity,

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especially in view of the high levels of religious belief that this system has since fostered. This special path, in turn, helps account for why the United States presents a political "anomaly" on the world stage in contrast to normal (meaning properly secularized) Western industrialized nations. It also helps explain Europeans' fascination with American religious life and their inability to translate this fascination from caricature and condescension to understanding and engagement.

This secular worry about America has roots on both the right and the left in Europe. For traditionalists, it is a manifestation of a residually aristocratic, culturally organicist, pre-democratic spirit, uneasy with modern economic and political freedoms. For progressives, it is a by-product of a secularist vision of historical progress born in the Enlightenment and the French Revolution. But for both, the United States represents a problem, an inadequacy, and a flawed historical trajectory.

To the conservative, nostalgic imagination of nineteenth-century Europe, the American religious experiment represented a dangerous plunge into religious confusion and cultural anarchy. The United States sets "altar against altar," noted Austria's Count Metternich, and thus the new nation was an abiding affront to Europe's religious heritage of established churches. The great Swiss historian Jacob Burckhardt defined Americans as a people who "renounce history," whose religious life is at once parasitically attached to Old World faiths but prone to "absurd forms" on the American frontier. Upon arriving in the United States in 1844, the Reformed theologian Philip Schaff worried that Christianity in America was destined for a career of disorder and splintering: "Tendencies, which had found no political room to unfold themselves in other lands [are] wrought here without restraint," he wrote. "Every theological vagabond and peddler may drive here his bungling trade. . . . What is to come of such confusion is not now to be seen."

The Anglicans Frances Trollope and Bishop Samuel Wilberforce reached comparable conclusions. After residing for several years in the Midwest, Trollope published in 1832 *The Domestic Manners of the Americans*. Her portrait of America as a nation of revivalist zealots became a bestseller in British literary circles. It is "impossible to remain many weeks" in the United States, she wrote, "without being struck with the strange anomalies produced by its religious system." Bishop Wilberforce once opined that "every fantastic opinion that has disturbed the peace of Christendom has been reproduced in stranger growth on the other side of the Atlantic," and the result threatened to "obliterate civilization."

A variant, aristocratic strain of anti-Americanism vis-à-vis religion—akin to, even if also different from, conservative nostalgia—was articulated among German university elites in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Although generally not as religiously traditional as Trollope or Wilberforce, fin-de-siècle German academic mandarins believed that their worldview, embodied in an internationally renowned university system and derived from a highly intellectualized Protestantism, best preserved the values of authentic culture, one capable of producing a Goethe, Schiller, or Kant. By contrast, America represented a utilitarian, mass civilization in which individualistic and commercial interests suffocated intellectual and spiritual ones. One finds this sentiment expressed by figures as diverse as Adolf von Harnack, Ernst Troeltsch, Oswald Spengler, Werner Sombart, and, not least, Max Weber, whose memorable metaphor of modernity as an "iron cage" is framed by explicit references to the United States.

The German mandarins' depiction of America as a religiously deformed, economically utilitarian, and culturally shallow civilization reached its high point with Martin Heidegger, in his conception of America as the site of "cultural catastrophe." "Americanism," he wrote in 1942, as the Holocaust was underway, is "the most dangerous shape of boundlessness, because it appears in the form of a democratic middle-class way of life mixed with Christianity, and all this in an atmosphere that lacks completely any sense of history." "Americanism," as he put it elsewhere, "is the still unfolding . . . metaphysical essence of the emerging monstrousness of modern times." The Heideggerian image of "the American" as a "mass man" devoid of history and culture, holding desperately to a naive, sectarian faith, became an article of certainty in the anti-American polemics of subsequent, *au courant* deep thinkers such as Herbert Marcuse (*One-Dimensional Man*) and Jean Baudrillard (*Amérique*), whose influence in the modern academy, on both sides of the Atlantic, has been considerable.

Other European strains of anti-Americanism derive from what the French call *laïcité*. These secularist strains attracted many prominent voices in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. From this vantage point, what distinguished the American system was not so much that it produced religious-cultural disarray but that it preserved variants of premodern religiosity all too well—sectarian variants, to be sure, but ones stubbornly impervious to enlightenment or elimination. Criticism from this angle focused more on cultural backwardness (a progressive fear) than on cultural anarchy (a conservative

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fear), although the two could often blend together. The United States had taken a peculiar road to modernity, in this interpretation, one congenitally lacking sufficient secularist impulses.

The *philosophe* Marquis de Condorcet typified this line of thinking in his *Sketch for an Historical Picture of the Progress of the Human Mind* (1795). While he admired the American Revolution, it ultimately came up short when compared to the French Revolution, whose animating impulses were "purer, more precise, and more profound than those that guided the Americans." The French had "more successfully escaped every kind of prejudice," and the revolution in France, Condorcet concluded, "was more far-reaching than that in America."

For the progressive imagination of the nineteenth century, no thinker proved more influential than G.W.F. Hegel. In his scheme of world history, expressed in his *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*, America is consigned to a peripheral status, deprived of genuine world-historical significance. America, he wrote, is separate from "the ground that the world's history has taken place [on] until now. What has taken place in America so far is a mere echo of the Old World, and the expression of an alien vitality." For this reason, he told the students who streamed from across Europe to pack his Berlin lecture hall to "set the New World aside, along with its associated dreams, and return to the Old World, the theater of world history."

The American religious landscape presented a particular oddity to Hegel. While dismissive of confessional Christianity, he did not question Europe's state-church model, and he had high regard for Prussia's enlightened ministry of culture, which in his lifetime had managed to subordinate most ecclesiastical affairs to its oversight. What is more, Hegel championed liberalizing directions in Christianity, which he regarded as the ascendancy of *conceptual* Christianity (meaning ethics, freedom, and modern rationality) over *representational* Christianity (meaning the biblical narrative and confessional doctrines). To his mind, America was deficient because it lacked a state church, a European-style ministry of culture, and receptivity to the rationalized Protestantism that he sought to advance. From his seat in the Prussian capital, he saw America as a semi-enlightened, antistatist sectarian religious free-for-all, isolated from the important currents of world history. America is the land of "every sort of capriciousness," he wrote, a "total arbitrariness." "This explains the proliferation of sects, to the point of sheer madness."

Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, and numerous leftist thinkers expressed a mixture of wonder and disdain at America's religious life. For the socialists, the American Revolution represented a successful bourgeois revolution, but one strangely resistant to the more important socialist revolution and an attendant secular historical consciousness. In contrast to the critical-intellectual conditions of Europe, high levels of religiosity had oddly persisted in the upstart nation. In *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (1852), Marx suggested that America's more "conservative form of life" could in part be accounted for by the fact that "the feverishly youthful movement of material production, that has a new world to make its own, has left neither time nor opportunity for abolishing the old religious world."

In this view, the United States stood one stage removed from the driving forces of world history, not only because class antagonisms in America had not hardened to the point of conflict but also because "the old religious world" had thus far been spared the critical conditions of European intellectual life. Instead, Old World religion had gotten tangled up in the New World's "feverishly youthful movement of material production."

This unholy marriage of bourgeois productivity and deep religiosity became a staple of later Marxist analyses of the United States. Indeed, it has colored European perceptions of America ever since. "The French Revolution, Hegelianism, and Marxism," as the German political theorist Manfred Hennigsen has summed up, still "shape the matrix of political ideologies in Europe, and anti-Americanism is properly understood as the byproduct of these ideologies."

To borrow terms from British political parlance, European anti-Americanism vis-à-vis religion has both a "Tory" and a "Whig" genealogy: It is nourished at the extremes of a distinctly European political spectrum. On the one hand, it derives from nostalgia for established churches and a host of attendant pre-democratic, culturally organicist sentiments; the United States represents a disquieting departure from a more salutary ecclesiastical establishmentarianism, and a robust exercise of religious freedom is met warily as an indulgence in subjective caprice and commercial interest. On the other hand, European derision of American religious life evinces a Whiggish mien, insofar as the French tradition of *laïcité* and the master narratives of Hegelianism-Marxism are invoked, or subconsciously assumed, as the benchmark for appropriate historical development.

Despite their differences, Tory and Whig outlooks profitably suggest some common lines of inquiry relevant to present-day transatlantic divisions. Since these outlooks represent an outsider's understanding of

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American religious life, they should not be dismissed out of hand. Whether accurate or not, an outside perspective contributes to an examined life. Some European criticisms of sectarianism, for example, should worry Christians concerned with the sad fragmentation of the church in this country, while the Marxist-inspired analysis of the interplay between market forces and religion can be quite trenchant.

Even so, anti-American voices are often impervious to the possibility that the American religious experiment might offer significant historical and political lessons. Indeed, the objections of Europe's right and left have often regarded the American situation simply as the absence of certain specifically European conditions that are believed to be normative. Both views, one might argue, bear witness to an irrepressible European *mission civilisatrice*, with the United States serving Europe at once as poor learner, oafish foil, and didactic counterexample.

Finally, both European accounts of the American religious scene suggest the inadequacy of present-day analyses of anti-Americanism. The ending of the Cold War, the attacks of September 11, and the war in Iraq have certainly roiled transatlantic relations. But the divide between the Old World and the New is more fruitfully examined by looking at deeper cultural factors and the accretion of perceptions and interpretations over a much longer stretch of time. Contemporary European anti-Americanism must be understood against a backdrop of historical precedents—many of which has to do with religion.

Thomas Albert Howard is associate professor of history and director of the Jerusalem and Athens Forum at Gordon College in Wenham, Massachusetts. He is the author, most recently, of Protestant Theology and the Making of the Modern German University *(Oxford).*

The Dead Are With Us

The dead are with us when they sing.
Though we can't see them anymore,
they sing in very little things.

They sing in clinking wedding rings,
in zippers of the clothes they wore.
The dead are with us. When they sing,

we hear their teaspoons jangling
in the corners of our kitchen drawers.
They sing in all the little things.

Their voices are not sparkling,
not melodious or pure,
but they are with us when they sing,

and we prefer that—anything!—
to silence, to the words *no more*.
We look for every little thing,

each pocket, box we can explore.
We feel them with us when they sing,
and that is not a little thing.

Gwen Hart

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The Return of the Fathers

R.R. Reno

In *Prince Caspian*, the third volume of C.S. Lewis' *Chronicles of Narnia*, a modern young prince has rediscovered Old Narnia. He tries to restore the damaged realm, but the power of the wicked usurper, his uncle, is too great, and Prince Caspian's motley army of true believers is forced to retreat. Facing final defeat, Prince Caspian turns to his last hope: a magical horn that, it is said, always brings help to Narnia. The call of the horn sounds back through the ages and into a far world, summoning to Narnia her ancient kings and queens. They return and reverse the tide of battle.

Lewis intended his story of Prince Caspian as an allegory for the Church and its struggles against worldly powers. The magic horn that Prince Caspian blows symbolizes the promise Jesus makes that the gates of hell will never prevail against the community of faith. But there is also a narrower, more precise symbolism that sheds some light on our current situation. These days, the faithful are fervent, but we sense that we are as disarrayed as the Old Narnians—and we seem to be blowing the magical horn that calls back the great figures of the Christian past. Who would have thought that, in the early years of the twenty-first century, the most vibrant and serious field of Christian study would be the Church Fathers? But it is true. They are returning.

We certainly need their help. I teach at a Catholic university that employs hundreds of professors, and the evidence is plain to see. Only two or three scientists seem willing or able to speak about the relation between the truths of faith and the hypotheses of science. Nobody studies or teaches Dante. The extensive modern tradition of Catholic social teaching has no role to play in political science. The history department employs no one to teach the Middle Ages. Administrative initiatives consistently emphasize "diversity," and the practical effect, whether intended or not, is a slow reorientation of faculty and curriculum away from a collective focus on the Western Christian intellectual tradition. The retiring professor who specialized in Dryden and Pope is replaced by a young Ph.D. whose interests run to gender studies and postcolonial theory.

If this is happening at a self-consciously Catholic university, imagine what the situation is like at Yale and UCLA. Intellectual life is now dominated by the first truly post-Christian generation. A friend of mine at Yale two decades ago wrote his senior paper on James Joyce. He was fascinated by Joyce's use of trinitarian language. Ignorant of Christian doctrine, he set out to find a faculty member who might provide guidance. I remember his dismay when he told me that he could not find anyone who could explain to him the classical Christian doctrine of the Trinity.

The situation has only gotten worse in the intervening years. A student at Princeton and Harvard—or Georgetown and Boston College, for that matter—now studies with teachers who have no knowledge of Christianity other than the crude caricatures long retailed by progressive *illuminati*. Christianity no longer exists as an integrated worldview that shapes the education and mental habits of modern people in the West. The loss is significant: None of us can reinvent a Christian literary imagination, political theory, scientific culture, or systematic theology on our own, because a Christian intellectual culture is a collective, multigenerational project.

It is not the case, however, that we must live alone in the ruins of Christendom. The poverty of the present need not cut us off from the wealth of the past. One of the most important new facts about Christian theology in North America is the sudden popularity of the

R.R. Reno *is associate professor of theology at Creighton University.*

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theologians and pastors, monks and bishops, martyrs and missionaries, who first fashioned a Christian culture nearly two thousand years ago. The Church Fathers are returning as agents of renewal, guiding us toward the biblical source of a truly Christian culture.

We see the return of the Fathers in unexpected places. The *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture*, edited by Thomas Oden and published by InterVarsity, has been remarkably successful. Across twenty-eight projected volumes (eighteen or so are now out), the series presents a selection of patristic interpretations, organized around the verses of the Bible. The result is a grand *catena*, a style of commentary in which the Bible is illuminated by a selection of short passages from such ancient interpreters as Augustine, Origen, Chrysostom, and Basil.

Popular in the centuries following the debates that culminated in the great ecumenical councils and creeds of the fourth and fifth centuries, *catenae* were used to reinforce and pass on the authoritative interpretations from the age of the Church Fathers. In this way, the imaginations of biblical readers were socialized into the patristic consensus about God, Christ, salvation, the Church, and sacraments. That a twenty-first-century evangelical press has gone forward with a project committed to this mode of retrospective, consensus-building biblical commentary—and that the project has met with striking success—says something important about our time.

The *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture* is not unique. Robert Louis Wilken's account of the great patristic intellectual synthesis, *The Spirit of Early Christian Thought*, is widely read. In *The Beauty of the Infinite*, David Hart argues for the superiority of patristic metaphysics over the latest postmodern fashions. Graduate students at universities such as Notre Dame, who thirty years ago would have written dissertations on Karl Rahner and transcendental philosophy, are now more likely to focus on the speculative system of Origen or the Christian Platonism of the Cappadocians.

The professors have made similar changes. The Paul Tillich Society may soldier on, but at the large annual meetings of scholars in religion, sessions on the Church Fathers (especially their biblical interpretation) have increased manyfold. David Tracy, a perceptive reader of theological trends, no longer refers to Bernard Lonergan but instead frames questions of theological method in terms of the mysterious negative theology of the elusive ancient figure referred to as Pseudo-Dionysius. Even biblical scholars, the last Enlightenment rationalists in the now postmodern universities, have taken notice. Researchers are interested in how the early Church read the Bible, and the history of interpretation is a growing focus of scholarly inquiry.

What is striking about these developments is that they should not be happening. Weren't we told that *aggiornamento*—renewal through modernization—was the watchword of the Second Vatican Council? Hasn't the Catholic Church embraced historical study of the Bible and left behind the embarrassment of the old, credulous methods of the Fathers? And aren't evangelicals suspicious of church tradition, fearful that official doctrines and fanciful ancient allegories compromise the purity of the Word of God? For that matter, isn't everybody supposed to embrace feminist theology, liberation theology, and doing theology from the margins? And now, the Church *Fathers*! The patriarchs of orthodoxy are reascendant. The very voices of authority, men concerned about God and not difference, about Christ and not the Other, salvation and not revolutionary praxis, are back.

To some degree, the new scholarly interest in early Christian biblical interpretation was born from the senescence of modern biblical study. One cannot dredge forever the same dull channels of modern source criticism, form criticism, and redaction criticism. Fresh Coptic and Syriac manuscripts promise opportunity free from the deadening weight of scholarship on the scholarship of the scholarship of the New Testament.

Then, too, postmodern academic trends encourage this turn toward the Fathers. Instead of trying to discern the facts of the matter (Did the apostle John *really* write the Apocalypse of John? What did Jesus *actually* say and do?), postmodern humanistic study wants to analyze the process by which texts come to function as mechanisms of authority that shape our notions of truth. The Church Fathers and the arguments that come to define Christian orthodoxy provide a case study in the project of producing and policing a discourse of truth in Western culture. Spiritual discipline, interpretive consensus, ecumenical creeds—these defining features of the patristic project are (rightly) seen as so many instruments active in the formation of Christian identity. Postmodernism is fixated on authority, and because it is study of the patriarchs of the Church, patristics fascinates our patricidal age.

Whatever the pull of academic tides, the deeper reason the Fathers have returned is religious. John Paul II often spoke of the need for a "new evangelization" in the Western countries that once were at the center of Christendom but now are in a pronounced trajectory of de-Christianization. The need for a new evangelization continues to be emphasized by Benedict XVI.

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Neither John Paul II nor Benedict XVI, however, had illusions about returning to the pre–Vatican II mentality and its tendency to throw a great deal of energy into reinforcing the remaining fragments of Christendom.

In fact, as a young theologian, Benedict was part of the reforming consensus that thought the defensive pre–Vatican II mentality had contributed to the de-Christianization of Europe. Christendom could not be defended point by point, nor could it be buttressed by extrinsic ecclesiastical authority. This insight has led Catholicism since the Second Vatican Council to a more direct engagement with the post-Christian consequences of modernity in the West.

Similar trends appear to animate the evangelical world. Figures such as Francis Schaeffer have convinced many that Christian faith has philosophical, literary, artistic, and political consequences. The old tools of neo-Calvinist dogmatics, Darbyite dispensationalism, and inductive Bible study seem unable to make sense out of the culture-creating reality of Christ. The recent turmoil over so-called "open theism" suggests that some evangelical theologians are putting themselves into barrels and going over the Niagara Falls of liberal theology. But most seem to see the futility and danger, and there are today many evangelicals who seek renewal of Christian witness with knowledge of the failures of modern Christianity in both its conservative and liberal guises.

For Catholics and Protestants alike, the Fathers now return because they were the original agents of evangelization. They did not solve all the problems of theology, and they did not achieve a final conversion of culture. Nor did they produce a single, monolithic system of ideas. Instead, through innumerable treatises, homilies, debates, meditations, councils, and ecclesiastical rulings, they wove a fabric of arguments that thickened the truth of faith. They constructed Christendom, not as a particular arrangement of imperial power working in concert with church authority (though at points that was part of the process), but much more broadly as a way of life and habit of thinking that gave a satisfying Christian focus to the artistic and political, moral and intellectual, concerns and ambitions of their day. Struggling to find a voice after Christendom, contemporary Christianity is now slowly, haltingly calling for the help of those who first gave a culturally vibrant voice to faith.

The Church Fathers return, but what do they bring with them? Any student who picks up a treatise by one of the Fathers cannot but notice the intensely scriptural focus. Textbooks will tell us that one of the important figures of early Christianity, Irenaeus of Lyon, articulated the idea of apostolic succession; affirmed the threefold ministry of bishop, priest, and deacon; and promoted the authority of a rule of faith that eventually took an important form as the Nicene Creed. A first-time reader, however, will find these ideas embedded in what seem endless arguments about how to read specific biblical passages. Heresy is not, finally, about doctrine; it is about reading the Bible in the wrong way. Or perhaps, more precisely, heresy is about doctrine because doctrine organizes our minds and shapes our reading of the Bible. At the end of the day, Irenaeus refutes his adversaries by showing that the doctrine he inherited from his teachers (who, in turn, inherited it from teachers who were taught by the apostles) allows for the fullest possible entry into the scriptural text.

Early Christian figures differ widely in style and emphasis, but the fundamental project remains the same. Arguments about the doctrine of the Trinity, elaborate treatises on the nature of language, signification, and metaphysics, as well as homilies, sermons, and practical exhortations to spiritual purification—all these dynamic and developing features of early Christian theology were organized around the singular goal of maximizing the grip of Scripture on the imagination of the early Church.

Origen of Alexandria illustrates the way in which the Bible exercised gravitational force at the center of the patristic project. His great speculative treatise *On First Principles* provides an account of God, creation, the nature of our humanity, sin and the fall, redemption, and the final consummation of all things. The idiom of Origen's thought was Platonic. Not a few readers ancient and modern have accused Origen of restating the primitive affirmations of faith in a philosophical manner and, in so doing, making Athens supreme over Jerusalem. Eusebius of Caesarea, who lived a century after Origen, records the opinion of the pagan philosopher Porphyry: "His manner of life was Christian . . . but in his opinions about material things and the deity he played the Greek, and introduced Greek ideas into foreign fables."

Yet this was not Origen's own description of his project. At the beginning of *On First Principles*, he explicitly states that all his reasoning and conclusions have "no source but the very words and teachings of Christ," by which he means not only the precise words of Christ in the gospels but the entire witness of the apostolic writings, as well as the teachings of "Moses and the prophets" that were written to prepare for and proclaim Christ.

Origen was a brilliant and creative thinker, but on this point he was entirely typical of the early Christian project. It is not the case, for example, that Origen places Christian ideas of creation into the horizon of

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the Platonic view of the emanation of reality from a singular beginning or source as rays from a great cosmic sun. He does exactly the opposite. His complex account of the origin of the soul and body in *On First Principles* functions as a radical subversion of the Platonic view, making Plato's scheme of emanation a subordinate moment in a larger scheme of creation that is governed by the first chapter of Genesis. Origen consistently places the dominant theories of antiquity into the horizon of "the very words and teachings of Christ."

Origen's particular speculative theology was largely eccentric to the subsequent development of Christian thought, more rejected than affirmed. And yet, more than one hundred years later, when the Cappadocians—Basil and the two Gregories—produced a more lasting Christian view of metaphysics, their method was the same. Gregory of Nyssa emphasized the importance of *theoria*, a Greek word that suggests not only a body of overarching teachings but also the movement of the mind toward that which is finally and fully true. According to Gregory, abstract and general philosophical doctrines are subordinate to biblical reading. Metaphysical statements are justified by their capacity to maximize the power of Scripture to draw all things into its witness to Christ.

The Fathers not only absorbed speculative thought into Scripture; they did the same with what we are inclined to call "experience." Living in the fourth century, Cyril of Jerusalem gave a series of lectures designed to prepare adults for baptism. He did not appeal to a general account of religious conversion or expound a philosophy of New Being. Instead, Cyril used the Exodus account of the Passover and crossing the Red Sea as a type or figure into which the newly baptized were to place their own deliverance from sin through the cleansing waters of baptism. Those listening to Cyril were encouraged to see themselves as participants in the pattern of divine redemption encoded in the scriptural text. Just as the Israelites were delivered through water, so also had they been delivered through water.

The same pattern is at work in Augustine's *Confessions*. Plato records that Socrates pursued a philosophical way of life because he wished to follow the Delphic commandment to "know thyself." Augustine organizes his *Confessions* around this imperative, asking, "Who am I, and what is my nature?" Our modern fascination with personality can blind us to the way in which Augustine answers the question. He does tell us about his inner thoughts, his desires and intentions, his struggles and failures. But more often than not, the words he uses come from Scripture, and time and again his account of his own life is interwoven with exclamations drawn from the Psalms. And this must be so, for Augustine describes conversion as an invasion of divine speech into the soul: "You had pierced our heart with your love, and we carried your words thrust through our guts."

The basic patristic project was simple: to take all things captive to Christ. The Fathers did so by saturating their ideas, their lives, and their communities with Scripture. But as they return, they do not simply bring us Scripture as an undifferentiated mass of text, nor do they thrust the Bible into our hands without instructions for its use. All the power of Christian truth may reside in the biblical text, but, as the Church Fathers recognized, we need to organize our minds and sanctify our lives so that the Word of God might live in us. This requires the discipline of the rule of faith.

In his refutation of heretical readings of Scripture, Irenaeus likened the biblical text to a mosaic. In late antiquity, a wealthy landowner could order mosaics for his entry hall or banquet room. A workshop specializing in made-to-order mosaics would color the tiles and then send the pieces out for assembly. According to Irenaeus, his adversaries read the Bible with no regard for its original design. Like workmen who ignore the enclosed instructions, the heretics "destroyed the figure of a man in the authentic portrait of a king, carefully created by a skillful artist out of precious stones, and rearranged the stones to make the image of a dog or fox." To read accurately involves assembling the mosaic of Scripture according to the divine plan. Readers must consult the rule of faith in order to arrange properly the many tiles of discrete scriptural episode, verse, and individual words.

Neither Irenaeus nor any other figure in the early Church thought a human being could possess God's plan as a workman might consult a handy instruction sheet or schematic drawing. The rule of faith was not an easy-to-read plan folded into the front covers of the Bible. Modern scientists are similarly modest. They do not believe that they possess "laws of nature" that can be inscribed into textbooks as the final word. But in neither case are uncertainties the same as aimlessness. Like modern scientists, Irenaeus and the rest of the Church Fathers endorsed the rule of faith as the preexisting body of theory that must discipline biblical interpretation.

Later councils and creeds give precision to aspects of the rule of faith, but its overall shape remains fluid. Yet this no more hinders the patristic project than the lack of a unified field theory limits modern science. For Irenaeus, the rule is a necessary framework for reading. One can no more invent Christianity from inductive

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Bible study than read modern physics off the movements of the stars, and a contemporary Christian who wishes to engage the Scriptures in their "purity" is as foolish as an undergraduate who refuses to take a class in physics because it will corrupt his ability to interpret nature. Under the guidance of the rule of faith, Irenaeus argues (and shows in endless, detailed exegetical digressions), we can avoid childish errors and simplistic solutions. The rule allows us to assemble the mosaic of Scripture "with a harmonious adaptation of its members, and without any collision," and thus do we enter more fully into the truth of Christ that Scripture reveals.

Seeing the truth and cleaving to it is not just a matter of having and following the right theories. Puzzling out the mosaic of Scripture is not simply a mental exercise. The patristic enterprise and the Christian culture it created shaped entire lives and not just minds. The rule of faith disciplines the whole person.

In modest ways, our present academic culture acknowledges the role of personal discipline broadly understood. Sloppy thinking stems from laziness, boredom, and the attractions of easy, convenient, and conventional conclusions. Thus, objectivity is a virtue we must learn through a discipline that is as much moral as intellectual. But the role of character in normal academic study pales in comparison to the patristic approach. The sacred texts of the Bible do not just provide data to be treated objectively. Fragrant with the aroma of the redemptive sacrifice of Christ, they must be engaged by minds prepared by prayer, fasting, and self-control.

In his account of biblical interpretation, *On Christian Doctrine*, Augustine gives an especially clear account of the need for spiritual purification. He likens us to lost travelers, "miserable in our wanderings and desiring to end it and return to our native country." But we cannot make progress, because we take delight in specific aspects of the finite world and become "entangled in a perverse sweetness." Our desire to return to God shifts and turns back upon itself as we devote ourselves to finite things for their own sakes. In this way, Augustine continues, "men are driven back to their country by evil habits as by contrary breezes." Elsewhere, he shifts the image from sea to land. "We are on a road," he writes, "which is not a road from place to place but a road of affections, which [is] blocked, as if by a thorny hedge, by the past malice of our sins."

According to Augustine, the problem is not that we have bodies and live in a finite world. Sin is not ontological, as if being a finite, embodied creature were the root of our problem. Instead, the problem rests in our will and personality. We can either love and enjoy finite reality, taking it to be the sum total of what makes life worth living, or we can use that reality in such a way that we make spiritual progress toward the infinite and eternal truth that is the Holy Trinity. The latter is the way of sanctification, for it requires us to discipline our finite loves so that they might serve rather than impede a crowning love of God. "The mind should be cleansed," as Augustine writes, so that we can see the divine light. This cleansing is not speculative or abstract. It involves the specific moral and spiritual disciplines of the Christian life.

As historical critics like to tell us over and over again, the Bible is an embodied, historical text, conditioned by the finite realities of cultural context and shaped by real human authors, editors, and audiences. For this reason, the need for spiritual discipline is pressing. Only as we allow ourselves to be subjected to the discipline of apostolic prayer and practice can we imagine ourselves capable of handling the finite, human reality of the biblical text properly. A worldly, vain, grasping, and venal person cannot be trusted to interpret scientific data accurately, as the recent and undoubtedly continuing scandals in the money-soaked and fame-intoxicated world of bioengineering illustrate. One need be no prude to insist that a functional scientific culture requires moral standards. How much more should we prize spiritual discipline in our biblical interpreters?

Thus, in the first of his famous *Theological Orations*, when Gregory of Nazianzus meditates on the nature of theology, he gives priority to spiritual formation over the intellectual. Theology "is not for all men, but only for those who have been tested and have found a sure footing in study, and, more importantly, have undergone, or at least are undergoing, purification of body and soul."

In 411, Alaric sacked the city of Rome. Through the next three centuries, the western Roman empire was shattered by invasion after invasion. It was a hard time dominated by fierce men as cultural fragmentation and turmoil gave the upper hand to cunning and strength. Yet the warriors who so dominated the affairs of men were not, finally, in control of their future. For it was during this time that a young man named Benedict rallied the power of love. Benedict was a son of Old Narnia, a noble Roman by birth. He was born to assume a position of power and responsibility in a world both civilized and Christianized. But that world was being destroyed, and, instead of trying to find a fragment or piece to hang on to, Benedict retreated to a cave outside Rome in order to purify his soul and dwell more fully in the way of Christ.

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Holiness is a powerful magnet, and others came to Benedict for guidance and inspiration. He eventually came out of his cave with a small force of men and founded a monastery on Monte Cassino. He wrote a rule for the community, the Rule of St. Benedict. Shorn of metaphysics, shorn of classical rhetoric, shorn of the glories of a great culture Christianized, the Rule was the pure essence of the patristic project. Plain, direct, and simple, it organized life around unending daily prayer and prepared the souls of the monks for obedience. The Rule and its life of discipline impaled generations of monks upon the sword of Scripture. In this way, their hearts were, to recall Augustine's image of his own and his friend's conversion, pierced by God's love.

The issues preoccupying editorial pages and the evening news are not trivial or unimportant. We have a duty to fight for moral truth in a Western culture increasingly committed to a velvet barbarism. This will certainly involve defending and buttressing fragments of a Christian culture now being eroded. The libraries of the great monasteries that sprang from the renewing power of St. Benedict's Rule preserved the intellectual and literary achievements of antiquity, and the vision of mutual submission and cooperation given flesh in the working communities of monks gave a bloody world hope of peace. We owe our own age nothing less.

But we should not confuse what we must do for the defense of life and social sanity with the deeper task of renewing Christian culture in the West. St. Benedict's Rule did far more than any battle or palace coup to shape the future of what was to become Europe. We must do what we can to limit the damage done by the barbarians of our time, but the renewal of the culture they now control will require the revolutionary power of people whose lives are immersed in Scripture. Men and women saturated by Scripture are as explosive as rags soaked in gasoline, but, unlike Molotov cocktails, the fire of divine love transforms and perfects rather than destroys and consumes. This the Fathers knew, and this they teach us as they return. FT

Brother Body

Brother body is poor . . . we need a fortune
for him. He used to be the wealthy one,
so pardon him his wretched little moods.
And if he acts as if we've never met,
let fall a subtle hint of what's in common.

We're well aware we're not one solitude,
but two: our consciousness and He;
we owe each other so much gratitude—
just how it is with friends! We learn how tough
it is in sickness—comrades have it rough!

—Rainer Maria Rilke, translated by Terese Coe

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Public Morality, Public Reason

Robert P. George

A contest of worldviews in our time pits devout Catholics, Protestants, Jews, and other believers against secularist liberals and those who, while remaining within the religious denominations, have adopted essentially secularist liberal ideas about personal and political morality. The contest manifests itself in disputes over abortion, embryo-destructive research, and euthanasia, as well as in issues of sex, marriage, and family life. Underlying these specific conflicts are profound differences about the nature of morality and the proper relation of moral judgment to law and public policy.

I am hardly the first to recognize the existence of this conflict of worldviews. People on both sides have noticed it, commented on it, and proposed ideas about how an essentially democratically constituted polity ought to come to terms with it. The trouble is that the issues dividing the two camps are of such profound moral significance—on either side's account—that merely procedural solutions are not good enough. Neither side will be happy to agree on decision procedures for resolving the key differences of opinion at the level of public policy where the procedures do not guarantee victory for the substantive policies they favor. This is not a matter of people being irrationally stubborn; rather, it reflects the considered judgment of people on both sides that fundamental and therefore nonnegotiable issues of justice are at stake.

Jürgen Habermas in Europe and the late John Rawls in the United States are perhaps the premier examples of secular thinkers who have taken the measure of the problem and proposed terms of engagement that, they believe, can be affirmed by reasonable people across the spectrum of opinion. Both single out Catholicism as an example of a non-liberal "comprehensive doctrine" that may nevertheless affirm essentially liberal terms of engagement with competing comprehensive doctrines. Indeed, they argue, one needn't be a secular person, much less a secularist, to endorse their teachings. There is plenty of room, they say, for religious people of various stripes to affirm the secular principles and norms that should govern political life in contemporary pluralistic democratic societies. Indeed, their goal is to identify principles and norms that can reasonably be accepted by believers and unbelievers alike, and affirmed by people irrespective of their convictions about human nature, dignity, and destiny.

From a Catholic vantage point, there is nothing startling or troubling about the quest to identify moral and political principles that can reasonably be affirmed without appeal to theological claims or religious authority. That's one description, accurate so far as it goes, of the enterprise known as natural law theory. But there is something deeply alien to Catholic thought about separating inquiry into moral and political principles from questions pertaining to human nature, dignity, and destiny. According to the Catholic understanding, moral and political philosophy is, in significant measure, an inquiry into human nature, dignity, and destiny.

Inasmuch as Habermas and Rawls propose theories of political morality that purport to prescind from such basic questions, there appears to be a fundamental

ROBERT P. GEORGE *is McCormick Professor of Jurisprudence and director of the James Madison Program in American Ideals and Institutions at Princeton University.*

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incompatibility between their proposals and the Catholic approach to moral and political theory. This is a problem for Habermas and Rawls. Both men offer theories that reasonable people of diverse faiths, including Catholics, are supposed to be able to endorse without compromising their faith.

Moreover, for both Habermas and Rawls it is important that Catholics in particular be able to endorse their theories—in part because Catholicism is the world's largest religion, and in part because contemporary Catholicism affirms and even promotes liberal democracy as a political ideal. Pope John Paul II repeatedly praised democracy, describing it as the political system most consistent with both man's nature as a rational creature and the principle of the equality in dignity of all human beings. Since the Second Vatican Council, popes and other Catholic officials have regularly preached the obligation of governments to respect and protect human rights, including the freedom of religion. While the Church does not rule out state-established religions (such as exist in Great Britain and Israel), it does not promote them, even where Catholicism is the dominant faith, and it strictly demands respect for religious liberty, even where established religions exist.

Given these and other "liberal" dimensions of Catholic social and political teaching, it would be particularly awkward for Rawls or Habermas if Catholics could not, in good conscience, affirm their political theories. Indeed, the inability of these theories to accommodate Catholics, if proven, would invite the suspicion that there is something distinctly sectarian about them. It would suggest that the theories are not merely secular but fully *secularist*.

In his influential 1971 book *A Theory of Justice*, Rawls defended what he called "justice as fairness," in which basic principles for a well-ordered society are identified as those that would be chosen by free and equal persons in what he called "the original position." Parties in "the original position" select principles in a state of ignorance regarding their personal moral and religious convictions, social and economic status, and related factors that will distinguish them from many of their fellow citizens when they emerge from behind "the veil of ignorance" to live in a society governed in accordance with the principles they had selected.

In 1993, Rawls published a new book, *Political Liberalism*, which amends certain features of the theory he had advanced in 1971. Most important, Rawls conceded that the argument for "justice as fairness" in *A Theory of Justice* relied on a premise that was inconsistent with the theory itself: the belief that "in the well-ordered society of justice as fairness, citizens hold the same comprehensive doctrine, and this includes aspects of Kant's comprehensive liberalism, to which the principles of justice as fairness might belong."

By a "comprehensive doctrine," Rawls means something like a worldview—an integrated set of moral beliefs and commitments reflecting a still more fundamental understanding of human nature, dignity, and destiny. Rawls' problem with the position he had adopted in *A Theory of Justice* is that liberalism (considered a "comprehensive," as opposed to a merely "political," doctrine) is not held by citizens generally in contemporary pluralistic societies. Liberalism considered as such—plainly a secularist view—competes in such societies with Catholicism, as well as with various forms of Protestantism and Judaism, and with other religious and secular comprehensive doctrines. Indeed, liberalism considered as a comprehensive doctrine is plainly a minority view in the United States. Most Americans reject secularism of any type, including secularist liberalism. In any event, Rawls' revised understanding is that a plurality of comprehensive views, religious and secularist, is natural and unavoidable in the circumstances of political freedom that characterize constitutional democratic regimes. Political theorizing that accepts the legitimacy of such regimes must begin, therefore, by acknowledging what Rawls calls "the fact of reasonable pluralism."

To appeal to comprehensive liberalism, Rawls concedes, would be no less sectarian than to appeal to Catholicism or Judaism. Some alternative must, therefore, be found or the social stability of such regimes would be in constant jeopardy. Everything would depend on the capacity and willingness of people with fundamentally different moral views—including radically different conceptions of justice and human rights—to reach and preserve a *modus vivendi*.

The alternative Rawls proposes is "political liberalism." Its ideal is that "citizens are to conduct their public political discussions of constitutional essentials and matters of basic justice within the framework of what each sincerely regards as a reasonable political conception of justice, a conception that expresses political values that others as free and equal also might reasonably be expected to endorse."

The core of this political liberalism is the idea that, whenever constitutional essentials and matters of basic justice are at stake, political actors must refrain from acting on the basis of principles drawn from their comprehensive views except to the extent that "public reasons, given by a reasonable political conception, are presented sufficient to support whatever the comprehensive doctrines are introduced to support." Thus,

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citizens are constrained from appealing to and acting on beliefs drawn from their most fundamental moral understandings and commitments precisely at the most fundamental political level.

Rawls' political liberalism aspires, then, to be impartial with respect to the viewpoints represented by the various reasonable comprehensive doctrines that compete for the allegiance of citizens. It "does not attack or criticize any reasonable [comprehensive] view," Rawls claims. "Rather than confronting religious and nonliberal doctrines with a comprehensive liberal philosophical doctrine, the thought is to formulate a liberal political conception that those nonliberal doctrines might be able to endorse."

Rawls maintains that terms of cooperation offered by citizens to their fellow citizens are fair only insofar as citizens offering them "reasonably think that those citizens to whom such terms are offered might also reasonably accept them." This "criterion of reciprocity" is the core of what Rawls labels "the liberal principle of legitimacy"—the notion that "our exercise of political power is fully proper only when it is exercised in accordance with a constitution the essentials of which all citizens as free and equal may be expected to endorse in the light of principles and ideals acceptable to their common human reason." When, and only when, political power is exercised in accordance with such a constitution do political actors—including voters—maintain fidelity to the ideal of "public reason."

The "liberal principle of legitimacy" and ideal of "public reason" exclude as illegitimate any appeal to principles and propositions drawn from comprehensive doctrines. At first glance, the scope of "public reason" seems to be wide. It would, to be sure, rule out as illegitimate any claim based on the allegedly "secret knowledge" of a gnostic elite or the putative truths revealed only to a select few and not accessible to reasonable persons as such. But it would not exclude any principle or proposition, however controversial, that is put forward for acceptance on the basis of rational argumentation.

Now, Rawls himself cannot accept this wide conception of public reason. His goal, after all, is to limit the range of morally acceptable doctrines of political morality in circumstances of moral pluralism to the single doctrine of "political liberalism." The wide conception of public reason will not rule out propositions drawn from comprehensive forms of liberalism. More important, it will not exclude propositions drawn from non-liberal comprehensive doctrines that content themselves with appeals to "our common human reason."

Notable among such doctrines is the broad tradition of natural law thinking about morality, justice, and human rights. This tradition poses an especially interesting problem for Rawls' theory of public reason because of its integration into Catholic teaching. So it is, at once, a non-liberal comprehensive philosophical doctrine *and* part of a larger religious tradition that, in effect, proposes its own principle of public reason.

If Rawls is to defend a conception of "public reason" narrow enough to exclude appeals to natural law, he must show that there is something unfair about such appeals. And he must demonstrate this unfairness without appeal to comprehensive liberalism or any other comprehensive conception of justice that competes with the natural law conception. In other words, he must avoid smuggling in principles that are themselves in dispute among adherents to reasonable comprehensive doctrines.

This, it seems to me, he has not done and, I believe, cannot do. Rawls does not explicitly address the claims of natural law theorists. He seems, however, to have their beliefs in mind in his critique of what he calls "rationalist believers who contend that [their] beliefs are open to and can be fully established by reason." Rawls' argument rests entirely on the claim that these "rationalist believers" unreasonably deny "the fact of reasonable pluralism."

But do they? Rawls' own methodological commitments mean that he cannot rule out the views of natural law theorists or rationalist believers on such issues as homosexuality, abortion, euthanasia, and drugs on the grounds that their views are unsound, unreasonable, or false—or else his *political* liberalism would have collapsed again into a *comprehensive* liberalism. He thus limits himself to a simple denial that the claims of the rationalist believers "can be publicly and fully established by reason."

But how can this denial be sustained independently of some engagement with the specific arguments they advance—arguments that Rawls' idea of public reason is meant to exclude without an appeal to their soundness and reasonableness or the truth or falsity of the principles and propositions in support of which they are offered? It will not do for Rawls to claim that he is not denying the truth of rationalist believers' claims but merely their assertion that these claims can be publicly and fully established by reason. What makes rationalist believers "rationalist" is precisely the belief that their principles can be justified by rational argument and their willingness to provide just such rational argumentation.

Catholics and other natural law theorists maintain that on certain issues, including certain fundamental moral and political issues, there are uniquely correct

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answers. The question whether there is a human right against being enslaved, for example, or being punished for one's religious beliefs admits of a uniquely correct answer that is available in principle to every rational person. Pro-life advocates assert that there is similarly a human right against deliberate feticide and other forms of direct killing of innocent human beings, irrespective of race, ethnicity, and sex, but also irrespective of disability, age, size, location, stage of development, or condition of dependency. Differences over such issues as slavery, religious freedom, abortion, and euthanasia may be "reasonable" in the sense that reasonable persons can err in their judgments and arrive at morally incorrect positions. But, assuming there is a truth of these matters—something Rawls cannot deny and, one would think, has no desire to deny—errors of reason must be responsible for anyone's failure to arrive at the morally correct positions.

Rawls certainly cannot declare such views unreasonable because they maintain that on certain morally charged and highly disputed political questions—including questions of human rights—there are uniquely morally correct answers. The fact that reasonable people can be found on competing sides of such questions in no way implies that the competing views are equally reasonable. Reasonable people can be wrong, as Rawls himself implicitly acknowledges in his claims against the rationalist believers who are, after all, reasonable people even if their claim that their beliefs can be fully and publicly justified by reason is unreasonable. There is simply no unreasonableness in maintaining that otherwise reasonable people can be less than fully reasonable (sometimes culpably, other times not) in their judgments of particular issues.

In fairness to Rawls, we should acknowledge his treatment of the sources of moral disagreement in connection with what he calls "the burdens of judgment." To preserve the integrity of his political liberalism, however, we must read his account of the sources of disagreement in such a way as to avoid its collapse into relativism. If we do, then Rawls' idea of "fully reasonable" views—and even "perfectly reasonable" though erroneous views—refers to false beliefs that are formed without subjective fault. I think that this is what people generally have in mind when, though fully persuaded of the truth of a certain view, they allow nevertheless that "reasonable people" can disagree with them. The fact of "reasonable disagreement" in this sense is not a valid warrant for ruling out argument as to the truth of matters in dispute on the ground that reasons adduced in any argument "on the merits" cannot qualify as "public reasons."

In *A Theory of Justice*, Rawls identified the basic principles of "justice as fairness" by the method of "political constructivism," which asked what substantive principles would be chosen by parties in the "original position" behind the "veil of ignorance." In a key passage of *Political Liberalism*, he says that the "liberal principle of legitimacy" and the ideal of "public reason" have "the same basis as the substantive principles of justice." This basis remains insecure. Over more than thirty years, Rawls failed to provide any reason to suppose the injustice of principles of justice not selected under conditions of artificial ignorance by the unnaturally risk-averse parties in the "original position." Rawlsians seem to suppose that from the proposition that principles that would be selected *by such parties under such conditions* are just, it follows that other principles—which might well be chosen by reasonable and well-informed persons outside the original position—are unjust. But that does not follow at all.

Central to Jürgen Habermas' political thought is a distinction between "morality" and "ethics." As John Finnis has observed, in Habermas' work, this distinction "has much the same role as Rawls' untenable distinction between 'comprehensive doctrines' and 'public reasons.'" The distinction, in Habermas' case, is part of what he calls an "ethics of discourse" that "adopts the intersubjective approach of pragmatism and conceives of practical discourse as a public practice of shared reciprocal perspective taking: each individual finds himself compelled to adopt the perspective of everyone else in order to test whether a proposed regulation is also acceptable from the perspective of every other person's understanding of himself and the world." "Ethics," on this account, has to do with "how one sees oneself and who one would like to become," while "morality" has to do with the proper concern for "the interests of all." Political theory is fundamentally concerned, then, with "morality," not "ethics." And fundamental questions of the nature, dignity, and destiny of the human person are putatively excluded from the realm of political theory precisely because they are "ethical," not "moral."

According to Habermas, "Ethical questions point in a different direction from moral questions: the regulation of interpersonal conflicts of action resulting from opposed interests is not yet an issue. Whether I would like to be someone who in case of acute need would be willing to defraud an anonymous insurance company just this one time is not a moral question, for it concerns my self-respect and possibly the respect that others show me, but not equal respect for all, and hence not the symmetrical respect that everyone should accord the integrity of all other persons."

Finnis has put his finger on the problem here: "The compatibility of self-respect with this dealing with the

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insurance company cannot . . . be rationally assessed without making 'moral' judgments about the conditions on which property rights are justly respected and justly overridden, and about the injustice of fraud, and so forth." But if that is true, the distinction itself begins to collapse.

Worse still, Habermas employs the distinction in a way that implicitly answers the question much disputed in our culture of *who is to count* as within the "all" whose interests must be taken into account in making moral judgments, while purporting to lay aside the evaluation of certain types of homicide as merely ethical. Writing in a law-review symposium devoted to his work in legal and political theory, Habermas raised the questions of abortion and euthanasia as cases involving "ethical" judgment and not "morality."

Of course, the claim of pro-life citizens is that a just law will protect the lives of the unborn and the frail or disabled precisely because justice requires respect for the fundamental interests of "all." No human being may be excluded from the community of the commonly protected on the basis of age, size, stage of development, disability, condition of dependency, or any other of the grounds on which supporters of abortion and euthanasia seek to exclude some human beings in order to justify these practices. The discourse into which pro-life people invite their fellow citizens is precisely a discourse about the reasonableness or unreasonableness of such exclusion. People on the pro-life side offer rational grounds—public reasons—for protecting the unborn and the disabled from being killed. They offer to show that the exclusion of the unborn and the disabled from the protections of the law is arbitrary and, as such, unjust.

Habermas, however, expressly speaking of Catholics, suggests that pro-life citizens are bound to accept legal abortion and euthanasia precisely because these are ethical questions, concerned with what is the best way to live, and not moral questions, concerned with the interests of all. Indeed, he implies that morality requires pro-life citizens to refrain from acting on the basis of their ethical judgments, not because these judgments are in any way unsound, untrue, or unreasonable, but because they are ethical. The abstention is required, in other words, by a due regard for "the interests of all."

Yet, on what ground are the interests of the unborn or the severely disabled to be excluded from consideration? If the question of who is to count as within the *all* whose interests must be taken into consideration is an ethical one, then it is clear that moral questions depend on ethical judgments—judgments regarding the nature and dignity of the human person—that cannot be avoided or relegated to the domain of the private.

There is in John Rawls' later work an almost exact parallel to Jürgen Habermas' error on this point. In *Political Liberalism*, Rawls raises the issue of abortion in a footnote—the one concrete contemporary political issue Rawls uses to illustrate the application of his doctrine of public reason. He asserts, "as an illustration," that "any reasonable balancing" of the political values of respect for human life, "the ordered reproduction of political society over time," and women's equality would "give a woman a duly qualified right to decide whether or not to end her pregnancy during the first trimester" and perhaps beyond. For the law to protect the life of the human being in the early stages of development would be to impose, according to Rawls, a "comprehensive doctrine" in defiance of the strictures of political liberalism.

Like Habermas, Rawls offers no argument as to why the developing human being should be excluded from the law's protection. He does not offer reasons to rebut those scientific and philosophical arguments and fully public reasons offered in defense of the rights of the unborn by pro-life citizens. (In the end, as Rawls himself later acknowledged, he merely expressed an opinion, not an argument.)

Also, like Habermas, he eventually gets around to addressing "Catholics" as such on the issue:

> Some may, of course, reject a decision, as Catholics may reject a decision to grant a right to abortion. They may present an argument in public reason for denying it and fail to win a majority. But they need not exercise the right of abortion in their own case. They can recognize the right as belonging to legitimate law and therefore do not resist it with force. To do that would be unreasonable: It would mean their attempting to impose their own comprehensive doctrine, which a majority of their fellow citizens who follow public reason do not accept. Certainly Catholics may, in line with public reason, continue to argue against the right of abortion. That the Church's nonpublic reason requires its members to follow its doctrine is perfectly consistent with their honoring public reason.

Even if interpreted generously as granting that advocacy of the strict prohibition of abortion can be consistent with public reason, Rawls' admonition to Catholics here is awkward. Plenty of American Catholics and others, most of whom reject resort to violence to protect the unborn from the injustice of abortion, reasonably refuse to recognize the right to abortion as "belonging to legitimate law."

Rather, they believe that any law recognizing a right to abortion is so gravely unjust as to be *illegitimate* in principle. As such, any law of this type should be

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opposed resolutely by people who understand its grave injustice.

As Finnis observes,

> [T]he argument of [pro-life] citizens is that the killings whose legalization Rawls and Habermas defend are a radical basic injustice imposed on people deprived or to be deprived of the protections of citizenship. The responses suggested by the argumentation of Rawls and Habermas would run something like: "*You* free citizens need not exercise the right to [own slaves] [abort your children] in your own case, so you can and must recognize our law as legitimate as it applies to the rest of us (and as we will enforce it against you if you interfere)." "*You* people need not do any of this [slave owning] [killing] yourselves, so your integrity is undamaged and so you ought (and will be compelled) to stand aside to allow us, in the exercise of our prior right of coexistence with you, to ['coexist' with our slaves] [terminate our coexistence with these unborn children/fetuses and with people whose lives are not worth living]."

In fact, advocacy of the right to life against the forces advancing abortion and euthanasia is an example of how the Catholic tradition of thought about justice and political morality honors public reason (though not Rawls' artificial and unreasonably restricted conception of it) and promotes an "ethics of discourse" (though not Habermas' artificial and biased version of it). Natural law, as Catholics and those of a similar mind understand it, truly demands that "the interests of all" be taken into account.

This is the implication of the principle that each and every human being is fashioned in the image and likeness of the divine creator and ruler of the universe and, as such, shares a fundamental dignity that others, including those exercising the highest worldly authority, are bound in reason to respect and protect.

Moreover, natural law is nothing other than a doctrine of public reasons that, as Finnis puts it, "would command a universal consensus under ideal conditions of discourse and meanwhile are available to, and could be accepted by, anyone who is willing and able to give them fair and adequate attention." These reasons, embraced and proclaimed by the Catholic Church, can be, and have been, affirmed by people who know nothing of, or do not accept, Jewish or Christian revelation or the authority of the Church or any other institution. Respect for these reasons *as reasons* accounts for the honored place of dialectic in the tradition of natural law theory and the emphasis of contemporary natural law theorists on full and fair debate in the forums of democracy on such issues as abortion, euthanasia, embryonic stem-cell research, human cloning, and marriage.

That is why, from the Catholic vantage point, there is something scandalous in the effort of theorists such as Rawls and Habermas to remove such issues from public debate by arbitrarily restricting reasons on one side of the debate over the nature, dignity, and destiny of the human person. There is nothing "liberal," "democratic," "reasonable," "moral," or "ethical" about that. FT

Mother's Day

On Sunday evening, after the party ends
and family have gone, you'd love to say
how you can't bear this gathering each May.
Your thoughtful husband usually sends
a rose bouquet, but changed his mind this year:
a special gift, it makes your finger shine
with emerald and ruby. "Too much wine,"
he banters as he wipes away your tear.
But you and I know, mother, what he can't –
your April foolishness; how bit by bit
they snipped me out of you, took care of It;
how through the years I've been your confidante,
the reason for this night's unraveling,
the garnet missing from the mother's ring.

Catherine Chandler

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The Ends of Science

Eric Cohen

Whenever I meet with scientists, I'm always struck by their optimism—and their discontent.

Mostly they are optimists, excited by the latest findings: the newly isolated gene variant that may help explain schizophrenia, the new telescopic images that reveal the violent births of distant galaxies, the geochemical discoveries that may change our understanding of Earth's formation. Armed with an endless array of PowerPoint slides, the optimists believe they are uncovering life's secrets slice by slice, defining humanity's place in the universe, making life better through their mastery of nature's mechanisms. Knowledge through experiment, progress through reason: They have no doubt they are on the right side of history.

And yet, at the same time, many of these scientists seem frustrated and unhappy. Some are furious because policymakers are ignoring their advice and policing their laboratories, either directly, by trying to ban all human cloning, or indirectly, by not taking bold steps to stop global warming. Some believe that religious fundamentalists are on the march, replacing the study of Darwinian evolution with the pseudoscience of Intelligent Design. Some fear that human beings are poised to wreck nature by polluting the atmosphere or poisoning the soil. Others feel defeated by nature's relentless brutality, by the tsunamis and earthquakes and childhood cancers that so regularly mock man's illusions of control. "Don't blame God," *Science* magazine exhorts us. "Better planning could make natural disasters much less disastrous." But that hardly seems to mitigate nature's relentless indifference to humanity or the misery of mothers left to mourn the dead infants of Java Island.

Eric Cohen *is editor of the* New Atlantis *and a resident scholar at the Ethics and Public Policy Center.*

Perhaps one reason the debate about embryonic stem cells has become so prominent is that it combines scientific optimism and scientific despair so completely: the optimistic search for cures, the discontent that nature yields remedies for her afflictions so slowly, the resentment at Bush-administration moralists for standing in the way of scientific progress for nonscientific reasons. The greatest animus among scientists is directed at religious believers, often defined as anyone who seeks limits on scientific freedom for ethical reasons the scientists themselves do not find compelling. The deans of major research centers feel like persecuted Galileos, yet they defend their turf in the most unscientific ways: treating the paralyzed as props in the campaign for research funding, promising cures based only on preliminary experiments, caricaturing every opponent as an irrational fanatic.

For it turns out that the methods of science cannot vindicate the ends of science, and the knowledge acquired by scientific methods cannot always justify the particular experiments used to acquire it. Yet scientists desperately want such vindication in the eyes of their fellow citizens: Good science (meaning *interesting*, *promising*, *exciting*) needs to be seen as good (meaning *virtuous*, *praiseworthy*, *compassionate*) by everyone. And so scientists have invented a new method to defend the unfettered freedom of the old one: They claim the mantle of science while making ethical claims ("embryo research is good") that rest on no special scientific basis at all, and they portray their opponents as antiscience for raising ethical questions that are entirely consistent with the scientific facts ("embryological development begins at conception").

Of course, the stem-cell fight is just one front in a long-standing conflict, not between science and religion, but between scientists who see all religion as an illusion and religious believers who desperately want

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the authority of science to bolster their faith's claims about the origins and destiny of man, including otherworldly claims for which there is no ordinary evidence. Both sides in this struggle make extravagant avowals about nature—especially about man's place within the natural world. And both sides are animated, in different ways, by visions of hope and despair, proof and mystery, man as elevated and man as small.

"The two world-views—science-based explanations and faith-based religions—cannot be reconciled," the esteemed biologist Edward O. Wilson recently wrote. "What then are we to do? Put the differences aside, I say." But such benign yet separate coexistence hardly seems like a viable option. The two realms mix whether we like it or not, and, to understand the meaning and limits of modern science, it is helpful to understand why modern science is often so hostile to religion—a task we can hardly leave to the scientists themselves.

Perhaps no idea offends the modern scientific mind more deeply than divine salvation. How weak we must be if we need a God to rescue us from the burdens of living in this world; how foolish we must be to let the fear of offending our imaginary savior get in the way of genuine progress. In *A Devil's Chaplain*, the biologist Richard Dawkins defines religious faith as a "virus of the mind"—or that childlike need to "suck at the pacifier of faith in immortality."

Otherworldly salvation comes in many different guises—salvation for all, salvation for those who believe in the one true God, salvation for those who lead good lives, salvation for those whom God chooses for his own inscrutable reasons. But the basic idea—"The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear?"—is the common heritage of Jews and Christians, who yearn for redemption in a world whose many blessings always exist under a cloud of misery. And yet, the scientists, empirical to the core, know that faith is a fraud, a delusion, a prison cell for small minds. And it bothers them to the depths of their rational souls—although, curiously, for a series of contradictory reasons.

These contradictions go back to the beginnings of modern science. In *The Great Instauration*, one of the founding texts of the modern age, Francis Bacon described what he believed to be the aim and meaning of human knowledge: "I would address one general admonition to all: that they consider what are the true ends of knowledge, and that they seek it not either for pleasure of mind, or for contention, or for superiority to others . . . but for the benefit and use of life, and that they perfect and govern it in charity. . . . [From the marriage of the Mind and the Universe] there may spring helps to man, and a line and race of inventions that may in some degree subdue and overcome the necessities and miseries of humanity."

The intelligent, in other words, have a duty to their fellow men: to seek knowledge in a way that ameliorates human misery, to seek power in the name of human charity. The trouble, as Bacon knew, is that the beneficiaries of his charity might not always be so amenable to his methods—methods that require violating not only the natural boundaries that exist between the species but also the divine boundaries that long divided the sacred from the profane. Where Leviticus ritually separates pure from impure with an eye to what is divine in man, Bacon's "New Atlantis" vivisects and recombines everything for the sake of healing man's animal body. "We have also parks and enclosures of all sorts of beasts and birds which we use not only for view or rareness, but likewise for dissections and trials; that thereby we may take light what may be wrought upon the body of man." On the isle of progress, the priest is replaced by the scientist, who conducts secret experiments to help his fellow citizens. This is the new charity.

Yet charity alone is hardly the only scientific motivation. For are we really to believe that the scientist's own pleasure is so unimportant to Bacon's project—the pleasure of knowing the world as it really is, taking it apart and putting it back together, coercing nature to reveal her true secrets? Are we really to believe that Descartes, who gave these fabulist visions a mathematical method, was not driven also (or primarily) by new aristocratic pleasures of the mind, pleasures that required the unfettered freedom to experiment?

From the beginning, science was driven by both democratic pity and aristocratic guile, by the promise to help humanity and the desire to be free from the constraints of the common man, with his many myths and superstitions and taboos. The modern scientist comes to heal the wretched bodies of those whose meager minds are always a threat to experimental knowledge. Salomon's House, where the elite of Bacon's scientific utopia would decide which inventions to publish and which to hide, existed both to protect men from science and science from men. It offers a new salvation and seeks to elude the oppressive trappings of the old one. It brings a new compassion and a new contempt. This was true in the beginning, and it is true today.

This double origin of modern science takes another form as well: seeing the unnecessary misery of false hope in God and the untold benefits of realism about nature—a realism often admitted to be tragic. The spiritual confidence of the believer offends those who know the twisted indifference of nature and that nature

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is everything. To the scientist, the believer is filled with more hope than he deserves to be, surprised by a joy that is not real, dreaming of a happy ending that will never come. Callous fate, not divine salvation, is the scientific news—and it is hardly good. As Alfred North Whitehead argued in his 1925 lectures "Science and the Modern World":

> The pilgrim fathers of the scientific imagination as it exists today are the great tragedians of ancient Athens, Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides. Their vision of fate, remorseless and indifferent, urging a tragic incident to its inevitable issue, is the vision possessed by science. Fate in Greek tragedy becomes the order of nature in modern thought.... This inevitableness of destiny can only be illustrated in terms of human life by incidents which in fact involve unhappiness. For it is only by them that the futility of escape can be made evident in the drama. This remorseless inevitableness is what pervades scientific thought. The laws of physics are the decrees of fate.

Darwin put this truth in a new, biological light: Man emerged from this "remorseless and indifferent" nature, leaving us with a tragic mismatch between our spiritual longings and our mortal condition. In the Darwinian view, our origins and our destiny are little comfort to those seeking meaning beyond the imminent or seeking redemption from the wretched errors of nature that leave babies to suffer and villains to prosper. Yes, man can take a certain satisfaction and experience a certain "grandeur" in his own natural ascent, as Darwin writes at the end of his masterpiece. But faith that the human story will have a truly comic ending, that it will end in a way that satisfies man's redemptive longings, that Providence is still at work, is weakened if not shattered.

But, of course, this tragic vision of life was not the whole truth about the birth of modern science, with its eyes set from the beginning on lifesaving "invention." The greatest obstacle to progress, wrote Bacon, lies "in the despair of mankind and in the supposition of its impossibility." If Christian hope offends the scientist, so does the believer's passive acceptance of misery and active obsession with sin. To live in a godless world means that we are just as innocent as nature is blind—free not to suffer, free to alter nature's workings for our own purposes, free to challenge the cold decree of fate as best we can muster.

Thus Condorcet, the French prophet of man's self-improvement, believed he was living in the "ninth stage" of mankind's progress, when reason will "lift her chains, shake herself free from some of them, and, all the time regaining strength" from the effects of the Christian Dark Ages to "prepare for and advance the moment of her liberation." As he proclaimed in his *Sketch for an Historical Picture of the Progress of the Human Mind* (1795), "Nature has set no term to the perfection of human faculties; that the perfectibility of man is truly indefinite, and that the progress of this perfectibility, from now onwards independent of any power that might wish to halt it, has no other limit than the duration of the globe upon which nature has cast us."

Not all contemporary scientists are quite as bullish about progress as Condorcet, with his limitless optimism about human destiny within the world rather than beyond it. Some even fear that the "duration of the globe" is quickly coming to an end through man's ecological abuse. But Condorcet's spirit still pervades the modern laboratory, especially the biological laboratory, which is now the high kingdom of empirical science. Once we see (with Darwin) that men are beasts, ascendant in nature but not created in the image of God, we are free to re-create nature as if we were gods: perfecting the body and the mind.

But Condorcet's original error—call it the original sin of the scientific Enlightenment—still haunts modern science: Perpetual progress is not the same thing as perfection. Infinite progress also means infinite discontent, as man is left in a state of eternal becoming with no end. "Indefinite perfectibility," Condorcet's dream, is an irreconcilable contradiction.

Perfection, after all, is an end, a limit, something definite. Christ embodies the perfection of love. The philosopher grasps the perfection of knowledge. Yet the scientist destroys the possibility of perfection by seeing a world in permanent flux. Perhaps the only perfection available to the modern scientist is stoic acceptance of contingency on the way to oblivion—and indeed, there is no necessary contradiction between stoic philosophy and modern natural science. Yet stoic acceptance of nature is precisely what modern science, technological from the beginning, is incapable of embracing in spirit. Modern science portrays a world where acceptance of our fate within nature is all we can do, and yet it remakes knowledge in such a way that technological striving is seen as the only thing worth doing. Modern biology, like Sisyphus, is haunted by temporary successes and ultimate failure. It fends off death but cannot eradicate it; it explains death's role in natural selection but not the death of individual men still thirsty for salvation.

Writing just after World War I, when the slaughtered troops and the reality of technological war had shattered some of the Enlightenment's optimism, Max Weber describes this tragic aspect of modern science with great pathos:

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> For civilized man death has no meaning. It has none because the individual life of civilized man, placed into an infinite "progress," according to its own imminent meaning should never come to an end; for there is always a further step ahead of one who stands in the march of progress. And no man who comes to die stands upon the peak which lies in infinity.... He catches only the most minute part of what the life of the spirit brings forth ever anew, and what he seizes is always something provisional and not definitive, and therefore death for him is a meaningless occurrence. And because death is meaningless, civilized life as such is meaningless; by its very "progressiveness" it gives death the imprint of meaninglessness.

Weber's essay on "science as a vocation" is perhaps the best starting point for understanding the limits of scientific aspiration in our time. Weber praised scientists for living in the world of facts and criticized those who sought salvation by pretending that the old gods still exist. But he also reminded scientists that they have nothing privileged to say about the realm of value, the realm that matters most to human beings seeking knowledge of how to live. Like everyone else, the scientist must decide which ends to pursue, which gods to serve, which demon will "hold the very fibers of his life." And these are exactly the questions that the scientific method cannot answer. Divine salvation may be an illusion but so is believing that science can tell us how to live in the world it dissects and describes, and how to live well in a world where scientific power is so readily, so seductively, so dangerously, at our disposal.

The impotence of science is perhaps most readily apparent in that realm where science is most powerful: nuclear weapons. Consider, for example, the current confrontation with Iran. Only the scientifically trained can provide accurate estimates about the state of Iran's weapons development, about the state of our own offensive and defensive military options, about the likely effects of a nuclear attack—the number of dead bodies, the hazards to the environment, the technical challenges of rebuilding. But when it comes to making decisions or evaluating the meaning of our nuclear predicament, the methods of science lead us into the nonscientific realm of interpretation.

The sociobiologist, who sees man in light of his long animal history and nature as a vast impersonal process, might say that the confrontation with Iran hardly matters in the cosmic scheme of things. Man killing man, culture clashing with culture, is inherent to nature's law of survival. Superior cultures, like superior individuals, triumph over inferior ones, at least in the long run. Life improves through death in a blind drama that continues unabated. The neuroscientist, who studies the brain to understand its mechanisms and improve its workings, might look instead to man himself as the agent for changing human nature. Perhaps our advancing understanding of neurobiology will eventually make tyranny a thing of the past. Perhaps our emerging science of the mind will bring a new age of man-made peace and stability, a "psychocivilized society." Perhaps Darwin's greatest species will triumph over Darwin's brutal laws.

Yet such interpretations are morally and strategically unsatisfying, to say the least. Human beings may be destined always to kill one another, but we leave ourselves morally impotent if we see this dark fact about the human condition as our only guide to moral action. Mankind may be destined to become something better, but discerning the difference between improvement and degradation requires some standard beyond the imminent processes of nature, lest we make ourselves into the subhuman denizens of Huxley's *Brave New World*. And while the unrestrained pursuit of knowledge is perhaps the core dogma of science, one imagines that any scientist with a conscience would reject the shelter of scientific freedom that even an evil regime like Iran might offer, a regime that might see the uninhibited investigation of the physical world as useful to its own perverse ends. While the *moral* obligation should be obvious, there is no *scientific* reason not to become an Iranian scientist.

In every area of public life where science and morality intersect, there are questions about the use of science that science itself can never answer. On stem cells, scientists can tell us the potential benefits of destroying human embryos but not whether the progress of medicine justifies the willful destruction of nascent human life. On drilling in Alaska, scientists can estimate the potential oil reserves and the potential harm to the ecosystem but not whether we have a moral responsibility to expand the domestic oil supply or to preserve an unsullied wilderness even with economic harm to ourselves. On human exploration of space, scientists can estimate the economic and human costs of putting a man on Mars and the potential benefits of such a mission to the advance of human knowledge, but they cannot say whether human greatness in space is more worthy of public funds than ongoing research into curing AIDS. Science is power without wisdom about the uses of power. As Hans Jonas put it: "The scientist himself is by his science no more qualified than others to discern, nor is he more disposed to care for, the good of mankind. Benevolence must be called in from the outside to supplement the knowledge acquired through theory: it does not flow from theory itself."

Yet the scientists still often want to tell us how to live, and they often claim the authority of science for

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their moral exhortations. Richard Dawkins, for example, ends his book with a letter of advice to his ten-year-old daughter on "good and bad reasons for believing." "Sometimes people have a strong inside feeling that somebody loves them when it is not based upon any evidence, and then they are likely to be completely wrong," he writes. These false feelings pass from one generation to another, from gullible parents to gullible children. "Could this be what has happened with religions"—this perpetuation of illusion? "Belief that there is a god or gods, belief in Heaven, belief that Mary never died, belief that Jesus never had a human father, belief that prayers are answered, belief that wine turns into blood—not one of these beliefs is backed up by any good evidence. Yet millions of people believe them. Perhaps this is because they were told to believe them when they were young enough to believe anything."

One can surely respect the integrity of the rationalist who doubts the existence of a heaven he cannot see and who is skeptical about theological claims that rest on dueling authorities rather than empirical evidence. But now imagine, say, a stem-cell biologist writing a similar letter to a ten-year-old girl in the cancer ward—a girl dying of the very disease the biologist cannot yet cure. The girl faces her demise with courage; she knows that God loves her, that the death of her body is not the end of her being. She prays every night, "Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me," and she still manages to smile every morning. What would the stem-cell biologist say to the girl he wants so desperately to rescue from the ravages of nature? Would he describe the miracle cures that will not come in time? Would he tell her that God's love is an illusion, that her prayers evaporate unheard and unanswered into the ether, that her brief transitory existence is all there is, that she is "sucking the pacifier of faith in immortality"?

Perhaps the rationalist can stomach a little bit of comforting illusion for a dying girl he cannot help. Or perhaps he believes her piety must be shattered for the greater good, since the lives of future children depend on destroying that fundamentalist faith ("embryos are sacred") that stands in the way of progress. Perhaps the young girl's courage will cause him to question his own rational certainty that the God she worships is simply an illusion, or to see her very desire for God as evidence of God's existence. Yet whatever letter the biologist writes, science cannot tell him what to say. Perhaps it would be better, at times, for the impotent scientist to say nothing.

But humility, alas, is not always a prominent scientific virtue, at least among the most prominent scientists, and especially among many modern biologists. And while science cannot decide for itself what to do and how to live, there does seem to be a prevailing pattern of scientific worship. Devotion to the scientific method seems to produce an ethos about the meaning of science. Of course, it is always dangerous to generalize, since science and scientists are so variable in spirit—consider biologists and physicists, academic scientists and corporate scientists, theoreticians and engineers. But it is also fair to say that certain general attitudes dominate the contemporary scientific mind or at least the elite organs of science (like the editorial page of *Science* magazine) that shape the influence of science on our culture.

First, *science invites us to believe in both charity and ruthlessness*. Modern biomedical research, most especially, often aims to help the weak by using the weak. It aims to help the sick, the suffering, and the desperate by using the embryonic, the dying, and the dispossessed. (Most recently, Ian Wilmut, the creator of Dolly the cloned sheep, proposed using dying patients to test unproven embryonic stem-cell therapies: a classic example of ruthless charity at work.) The experimental method blurs the line between those who benefit from scientific improvements and those who might serve as the experimental basis for such improvements. Science blurs the line between the human subject and the human object. This is especially true, perhaps uniquely true, in biology: By studying the parts of animals, the organismic whole is lost; the animal becomes simply a biological "model." And by studying human beings as animals, the line between man and the other animals is lost; man becomes simply another biological resource. The method of science becomes the ethos of science, or as Wordsworth put it, "We murder to dissect."

Second, *science invites us to believe in both human greatness and human smallness*. The greatness of man is the mind at work; our capacity for knowing is the singular measure of our dignity; the body is a machine on which science can work its wonders for the sake of the will. But science also cannot escape its understanding of human origins—emerging from the dust of the ground, without any notion of being created in the image of a perfect maker. In this view, man is both beast and angel, rather than image of God. This is why science can conduct the most ghastly experiments on animals (with godlike power) while also worrying as a guild about the effect of modern civilization on the animals of the earth, seeing man as more beastly than the beasts he destroys, or at least worth no more than the animals he uses. It is why science can devote so much energy to curing disease while believing that death is nature's way of improving itself.

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Finally, *science invites us to believe in both progress and nihilism.* Most scientists believe that knowledge will advance, technology will improve, human life will get better, if only they are free to do their work, unhampered by irrational taboos. And yet the perfect freedom that science demands is also, in the end, a form of nihilism. Science in itself sets no limits to human action, except perhaps those actions that inhibit the activity of science. But since the domain of science is infinite within nature, there is no action that could not, in fact, be redefined as an experiment. Some scientists hold that human beings are hardwired to behave in certain ways, including ways that are compatible with our bourgeois values. But this faith in human nature in general is not the same as believing that particular human beings have any particular moral obligations. It is a description of how human beings tend to live, not a set of prescriptions for how human beings ought to live. It is a study of man always open to refinement, not an image of man in which all our refinements should be judged.

And this brings us back to Condorcet's haunting legacy: Science destroys perfection in the name of progress, but its progress ultimately fails to satisfy. In the end, the cost seems too high for those seeking a more perfect salvation from the miseries of nature. The hospital chapel may be an architectural afterthought, but the chaplain (not the "devil's chaplain") still usually gets the last word. Our faith in science eventually gives way to our need for faith. We choose the hope of perfection over endless progress and unfettered freedom but only after trying for as long as possible to have everything without contradiction.

Unquestionably, the modern scientific project has been a great success: Our lives would be inferior—indeed horrible—in countless ways without the technological fruits that were always its primary aim. We have gone some way toward correcting the amorality of nature, using nature as our instrument. For the sick, in particular, scientists and doctors are often the first saviors, restoring normal life when the ugliness of death seeks another victim. The scientist is, sometimes, the personification of love in a method. Yet ultimately, the modern scientific project will always be a failure: Its powers do not satisfy our deepest longings; its victories are always temporary and its losses always final.

Even while many scientists accuse religious believers of zealously imposing their values on everyone, some seem to have embraced a new fundamentalism of their own: the belief that Darwinism explains everything important about being human, combined with the passionate need to convert the unconverted and unsave the saved. Confronted by the aimless nature they so laboriously study, many scientists seem to need a universal, all-encompassing framework to explain their existence. Yet while orthodox Darwinists believe that the law of animal survival explains much of human behavior, they also believe that being a scientist is nobler than being simply a gene-spreading animal. The point of the scientific project is not simply to see ourselves clearly as the beasts we are but to imagine that we possess the cleverness and magnanimity of gods. It seeks not simply to understand the law of death (evolution as we find it) but to wield mastery over life (evolution as we make it).

Despite its inherent limits and frequent excesses, there is great dignity in the scientific vocation rightly understood—the dignity of confronting nature's facts in all their beauty and ugliness, and the dignity of seeking to make human life a little less miserable. Science is, or can be, a noble vocation, a realm of human endeavor that invites human excellence, including moral excellence. Against the sin of despair, the scientist stands for action. Against the postmodern revolt against reality, the scientist seeks truth. Thrown into a world that is mysterious, the scientist seeks to bring into light what is so often shrouded in darkness.

The trouble is that most scientists—at least most modern biologists, whose work dominates the public imagination about science—do not seem to reflect much or deeply about the limits of their method, or about the moral significance of the ends they seek and the means they use. The recent book by human genome pioneer Francis Collins—a memoir of faith that might have been titled *C.S. Lewis Goes to the Laboratory*—is notable precisely because it is such a striking exception to the norm. In the public realm, most biologists seem, all too often, like scientific geniuses and moral simpletons, applying rational rigor to their investigations of nature but relying on feeling as their only moral compass. And for all its appreciation of nature's complexity, the scientific mind seems no rival for the Bible or Aristotle or Machiavelli in understanding human complexity. Next to the philosopher, the neuroscientist still looks, all too often, like a fool.

The scientist is especially foolish when he is optimistic without a dose of tragic reservation. For, despite Condorcet's claims, science is perhaps most necessary precisely because of the permanence of human sin and human evil, not because scientific progress will be the tool of their eradication. We will continue to need vaccine makers because evil men will make and use biological weapons. We will need missile-defense makers because evil men will use ballistic missiles. We will need surveillance-system makers because evil men will always be plotting the destruction of the innocent. Not the inevitable perfection of man in nature but the per-

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manent imperfection of the human soul makes modern science a moral necessity—including, at times, the kind of ruthless experiments that are justifiable only in moments of supreme emergency, when civilization itself lies in the balance.

And no doubt, in the days ahead, there will be many emergencies—anthrax attacks, avian flu, natural disasters, nuclear explosions—when the power of science will serve both the best and worst impulses of man in a world of great darkness. But perhaps our greatest challenge is trying to recover an understanding of human life and human death that avoids treating existence itself as a supreme emergency, an endless war against nature, a Sisyphean struggle with no Sabbath in time.

Faced with the contingencies of nature and history, perhaps we need to regain the kind of equanimity that faith often inspires. Faced with a world that so often seems absurd, perhaps we should not place all our hopes in science alone. In our hunger for still waters, nature offers no proof that man's redemptive hopes are justified, but also no proof that everything is hopeless.

Nature is filled with the good things it destroys; natural beings yearn for life even as they are born toward death. And one of those natural beings—man—knows that nature, even when mastered by science, will never satisfy our more-than-natural longings. Amid life's many horrors and wonders, those eternal longings will never go away. FT

Plus Ça Change

With variations on "Amazing Grace"
and second-liners yielding to the urge
to twirl their parasols and sway in pace,
New Orleans dances to a funeral dirge.

It's called a *renaissance*: the fabled place
of pleasure, which mad waters would submerge
and winds deform, is working on her face.

Through Mardi Gras and festivals and shows,
her lovers freshen up her tarnished name;
the Quarter streets and bars that brought her fame

propose their *nonchaloir*; the money flows
from FEMA and insurance. Who's to blame
if politics and graft are still the game?

Catharine Savage Brosman

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Henry James and the Heavenly Light

Bryan Berry

The Golden Bowl was Henry James' final novel—and it remains the most morally challenging of his tales. The 1904 book tells the story of an American heiress named Maggie Verver who marries Amerigo, an Italian prince. But she is deceived about Amerigo's past love affair with Charlotte Stant, who later marries Maggie's father, Adam, a wealthy art collector.

In the first half of the novel, Maggie doesn't really know her husband. She knows his family's history, and, like other Jamesian characters, equates nobility of family with a nobility of character (the romantic illusions of Americans about Europeans recur in James). So naive are Maggie and her father that they don't see that Maggie's marriage means that she must place her husband before her father; in their illusions and blindness, they arrange things so that Prince Amerigo and Charlotte have ample opportunity to resume their affair. "Stupidity pushed to a certain point is immorality," Fanny Assingham, the characters' confidante, tells her husband. Charlotte, too, criticizes Maggie's blind niceness: She relies too much on her own decency, Charlotte complains, "and nobody is decent enough—not without help from religion . . . not without prayer and fasting."

The novel is a masterpiece of multiple perspectives. The second half takes place largely in the consciousness of Maggie: Innocent Maggie perceives that something has happened and faces "the horror of finding evil seated, all at its ease, where she had only dreamed of good; the horror of the thing hideously *behind*, behind so much trusted, so much pretended, nobleness, cleverness, tenderness. It was the first sharp falsity she had known in her life."

In the crucial scene, Maggie watches the others playing cards—on the surface, a peaceful social setting but, underneath, one in which she sees her dilemma clearly: "the fact of her father's wife's lover facing his mistress; the fact of her father sitting, all unsounded and unblinking, between them." She "might sound out their doom by a single sentence," but, no, Maggie sees herself—who she is, what she must do—in terms of her relation to the others: as "*her* husband's wife . . . *her* father's daughter." On that basis, she will assume the burden tacitly placed on her by the group and be like "the scapegoat of old . . . charged with the sins of the people [to go] forth into the desert to sink under his burden and die." Maggie tells Charlotte, "I've never thought of you but as beautiful, wonderful and good." And, eventually, Charlotte is constrained to be as good as Maggie says she is; she asks her husband to leave London for America, leaving Maggie with Amerigo.

The prince is surprised by his wife's handling of the situation; she's smarter than he thought. Charlotte, conversely, is "stupid," as he puts it, for not seeing how much Maggie knows; "she doesn't really know you at all," he tells his wife. Maggie triumphs over Charlotte by "grovelling" to her; between Maggie and Amerigo "there occurred a kind of unprecedented moral exchange over which [Maggie's] superior lucidity presided." Maggie has grown from a "small creeping thing" to a real princess and, as such, can assure her father, before he leaves for America, ever innocent of his cuckoldom: "Charlotte's great!" By her forbearance and "superior lucidity," Maggie has terminated the adultery and enabled her father to really "get" a wife and herself to win a prince.

To love in James is to engage fully another's consciousness: his perceptions, memories, valuations, dreams, fears. "Ours was everything a relation could be, filled to the brim with the wine of consciousness," Maggie hears Charlotte pleading about her love of Amerigo. But, because of Maggie's handling of the situation, the "golden flame" of the adulterers' love turns out to be "a mere handful of black ashes." Maggie has won the battle of consciousnesses and captured her prince. And, through her initiation into knowledge of good and evil, the princess now *knows* her husband—knows his "per-

BRYAN BERRY *is professor of literature and communications at the University of St. Francis in Joliet, Illinois.*

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sonal quantity," about which (as he warned her) she earlier knew nothing. The princess also now knows *what* the prince knows and shares with her: "Everything's terrible, *cara*—in the heart of man." Not to *see* the other; not to *know* the other; not to drink in all that the other is; not to see *with* the other, through the other's eyes and heart—all this is not to love.

Although James' plots often concern deception and the dashing of illusion, no other writer has such high hopes for the spiritual communion possible between a man and a woman. "Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth," concludes Ecclesiastes, the source of the novel's title, before "the golden bowl be broken," when "the spirit shall return unto God who gave it." In James' novel, the golden bowl is an emblem of our hope for a *perfect* union of human consciousnesses in love. And yet, the bowl has a crack in it, for the perfect union is impossible in a flawed world. In the end, the novel points upward to an unseen ideal form of the visible good and the communion of souls.

Critics have disagreed over whether James successfully pulls off the novel's comedic ending, in which the couples are reconnected and the social order affirmed. Some have called the novel "decadent" and "morally absurd," noting that it is set in a "spiritually unregenerate" and "ethically decentered" world in which "marriage, like religion, is basically an empty form" and "conventional moral standards of any description have become irrelevant."

Such comments largely misunderstand James' project. In the landmark 1981 study *After Virtue*, the philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre points to the influence of what he calls emotivism—a moral perspective that was first adopted by certain rich Europeans and Europeanized Americans in James' day, though it now, MacIntyre argues, largely rules Western civilization. Emotivism is "the doctrine that all evaluative judgments and, more specifically, all moral judgments are *nothing but* expressions of preference, expressions of attitude or feeling." Like relativism, its close kin, emotivism posits no absolute moral standards.

MacIntyre traces the origins of emotivism as a self-conscious movement to 1903, when the Cambridge philosopher G.E. Moore published *Principia Ethica*. Leonard Woolf, J.M. Keynes, and others who would later come to be called the Bloomsbury Circle eagerly latched onto the book as an affirmation of their desire "to reject . . . all claims except those of personal intercourse and of the beautiful." In the emotivist scheme, "others are always means, never ends." The social world is "nothing but a meeting place for individual wills" in which a person attempts to align others' "attitudes, feelings, preferences, and choices" to his own: "The distinction between manipulative and non-manipulative social relationships has been obliterated," and questions of sincerity and authenticity are set aside.

James depicts such a moral world in *The Golden Bowl*, although in nearly all his works he is even more interested in the dialogue between moral perspectives and cultures—between, for example, the naive, romanticizing American and the wealthy (or would-be-wealthy) aesthete who interprets "reality as a series of opportunities for enjoyment and for whom the last enemy is boredom," as MacIntyre writes about James' characters. In *Portrait of a Lady* (1881), *The Wings of the Dove* (1902), and *The Golden Bowl*, men of modest means deceive wealthy women to win their worldly riches. Gilbert Osmond, the Europeanized American aesthete of *Portrait of a Lady*, is by far the darkest; he shows "what it means to be a consumer of persons," as MacIntyre writes.

But there is another voice in James: that of the narrowly moralizing New England Puritan so vividly depicted by James' spiritual forebear Nathaniel Hawthorne. This is the voice that recognizes the existence of evil, insists on moral absolutes, upholds social conventions (above all, marriage), and prides itself on its purity. It can be merely philistine (as with Mrs. Newsome in *The Ambassadors*), but it almost always adds to the measure of the truth of the circumstances. James leaves it to the reader to mediate between the voices, to supply what is needed. He is a master of the conditional mood and the qualifying phrase, of what *might* occur under *such* conditions if viewed from *such* a perspective.

"The likeness of a thing is received into the intellect according to the mode of the intellect, not according to the mode of the thing," as St. Thomas Aquinas put it. In the 1873 story "Madame de Mauves," the title character faces a situation similar to Maggie Verver's—but responds differently. Priding herself on her incorruptibility, she refuses to forgive her penitent husband (a French baron who married her for her money) for his adultery. "She was stone, she was ice, she was outraged virtue"; in despair, the weak, guilt-ridden baron blows his brains out. By contrast, in response to *her* husband's infidelity, Princess Maggie rejects "the straight vindictive view, the rights of resentment, the rages of jealousy, the protests of passion . . . usually open to innocence outraged and generosity betrayed," because she can't think of giving up her marriage to Amerigo (which, significantly, has produced a son) or her father's marriage to Charlotte. In *Wings of the Dove*, Milly Theale, the dying heiress, bequeaths Merton Densher her fortune even after she learns that his professed love for her is a scheme cooked up by him and his lover, Kate Croy, to win her riches. But Milly's generosity, like Maggie's in *The Golden Bowl*, unmasks the schemers to each other. Kate and Merton's love, like that of Amerigo and Charlotte, turns to ashes in the presence of the higher love.

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Several years before his death in 1916, James published an essay about life after death, which, he writes, "is the most interesting question in the world, once it takes on all the intensity of which it is capable." He focuses on what leads us to desire death "as a renewal of the interest, the appreciation, the passion, the large and consecrated consciousness . . . of which we have had so splendid a sample in this world." While admitting that "'science' takes no account of the soul," James asks us to reach "beyond the laboratory brain" to the "accumulation of the very treasure itself of consciousness." The "artistic consciousness," he continues, "shines as from immersion in the fountain of being. Into that fountain, to depths immeasurable, our spirit dips—to the effect of feeling itself, *qua* imagination and aspiration, all scented with universal sources." James confesses that his "*desire*"—not his "belief"—is that this consciousness will continue to draw sustenance from its source after the death of the physical body.

James admits that this view parallels "the theory of the spiritual discipline, the purification and preparation on earth for heaven, of the orthodox theology." But James simply does not know the God of believers; rather, "consciousness is my religion, human consciousness. Refining it, intensifying it—and preserving it," as David Lodge accurately summarizes James' lifelong project in his novel *Author, Author* (2004).

In his 1895 story "The Altar of the Dead," James shows how consciousness can create and sustain communities. George Stransom, the story's protagonist, is "not a little content" *not* to have the religion that "some of the people he had known wanted him to have." No, Stransom realizes, "the religion instilled by his earliest consciousness had been simply the religion of the Dead." Stransom enters "a temple of the old persuasion"—a Catholic church—and, in return for his munificence, wins permission from the bishop for an altar in a side chapel that is "consecrated to an ostensible and customary worship" but that, for Stransom, is really his altar of the dead. Stransom lights specific candles for specific dead and has "a quiet sense of having saved" his chosen souls more certainly than any orthodoxy could assure him: "This was no dim theological rescue, no boon of a contingent world," he thinks. "They were saved better than faith or works could save them." For Stransom's chosen dead are saved "for continuity, for the certainty of human remembrance."

Stransom's "sense of community" with the dead is heightened by the presence of a single living person, a woman (never named) who joins him day after day in the chapel and lights a candle for her own dead. Later, Stransom discovers that the dead she is remembering is the one man he must exclude: Acton Hague, his close friend, "the only man with whom he had ever been intimate," who then insulted and betrayed him. Stransom will not give Hague his candle; the community between Stransom and the woman is severed; she stops coming to the church. Months pass; Stransom is mortally ill. He and the woman meet one last time at the chapel. Their hearts have changed. Stransom embraces "one more" dead, Acton Hague; she embraces Stransom's dead. And then Stransom dies, adding by his own death "one more" to the dead to be "saved" by the community of human remembrance, now consisting of just one living member, the unnamed woman.

The communion in James' tales parallels the operation of the communion of saints in Catholic theology. In both, one person's selfish sins hurt the entire community; conversely, one person's generosity of spirit and acts of kindness benefit the whole body. In James, egotism—no matter how disguised as virtue or cloaked by ostensibly high ideals—is the enemy of communion, the thing that most blinds his characters and stops them from knowing each other.

In *The Beast in the Jungle* (1903), John Marcher's belief in his unique individual destiny—something is going to happen to him that has happened to no other person, he believes—blinds him to May Bartram's love. The beast springs (metaphorically) after May dies and John realizes he has missed his chance to love, for he "had never thought of [May] but in the chill of his egotism and the light of her use."

"All life comes back to the question of our relations with each other," James said. Life is a moral struggle, he wrote. "We can welcome experience as it comes . . . so long as it contributes to swell the volume of consciousness. In this there is mingled pain and delight, but over the mysterious mixture there hovers a visible rule, that bids us learn to will and seek to understand."

Given James' lack of orthodox belief, it is easy to see why secular philosophers such as Richard Rorty claim him as one of their own. James' novels "help us achieve spiritual growth," Rorty writes; James builds social solidarity by helping us to appreciate "the other." Five years before James' birth, in an address to the Harvard Divinity School seniors, Ralph Waldo Emerson had declared that the creed of the Puritans was "passing away" and that the hold of public worship "on men is gone, or going." We must leave behind all creeds and "go alone," seeing ourselves as "newborn bard[s] of the Holy Ghost, cast[ing] behind [us] all conformity."

Emerson was a friend of the family. He blessed William in his crib shortly after his birth, and Henry attended Emerson's funeral. Like Emerson, the boys' father, Henry Sr., believed in "the only true spiritual life, a direct intercourse with God," as he wrote shortly before his death. His "dying wish" was "that men should know and understand that all the ceremonies usually observed in births, marriages and funerals are

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nonsense and untrue." "Spiritual existence has always been more real to me than natural," James Sr. wrote. We "have a plenary divine origin and are bound to eventually see that divinity reproduced in our most familiar and trivial experience, even down the length of our shoe-ties."

This was a nineteenth-century version of the Age of Aquarius: American gentlemen crying "Down with dogma" and finding God in their shoelaces. His son, Henry James Jr., found himself in the same situation as do today's children of hippies and liberal secularists. He had to learn about organized religion secondhand—in his case, from the novels of Anthony Trollope and George Eliot. "There was no . . . detail of devotional practice that we [were] allowed to divine," James wrote. "I should have been thankful for a state of faith which would have supplied more features and appearance"; ours was "too imperceptibly peopled."

As an adult, the novelist son of the Emersonian father moved beyond Emerson, who, along with Hawthorne, was an "exquisite genius" but also an "exquisite provincial," as James wrote. He rejected Emerson's assertion that Americans needed "to extract the tapeworm of Europe from America's body." Rather, the interplay between the voices of Europe and America was the novelist's lifelong fascination. Emerson's "ripe unconsciousness of evil . . . is one of the most beautiful signs by which we know him," James politely noted.

Not to know the nature of evil is to miss a lot. The novelist's "experience taught him to believe in supernatural evil, but not in supernatural good," Graham Greene once claimed. Perhaps it is no surprise that James the novelist was never able to write about dogmatic Christianity from the inside out, from the spiritual perspective of a believer nourished by the faith. James represents plenty of believers—Catholics, mainly—but the perspective of faith as a wellspring of spiritual sustenance escaped him. At critical moments, Lambert Strether of *The Ambassadors* goes to the Cathedral of Notre Dame in Paris, where he finds "no altar for his worship, no direct voice for his soul" though he finds the church "none the less soothing even to sanctity."

In *The Wings of the Dove*, Merton Densher goes to the Brompton Oratory on Christmas morning to set right his earlier lie that he would be going to church. The "splendid service" at the oratory "didn't match his own day, but it was much less of a discord than some other things actual and possible. The oratory, in short, to make him right, would do." In *The Golden Bowl*, Princess Maggie, a Catholic who wears concealed a cross blessed by the pope, is troubled by her decision not to consult the prattling Catholic priest, Father Mitchell, about her dilemma; "she fear[s] the very breath of a better wisdom, the jostle of the higher light, of heavenly help itself." Yet "priests were really, at the worst, so to speak, such wonderful people" that Maggie believes Fr. Mitchell to be silently counseling her to be kind to Charlotte.

James' characters point to the heavenly light accessible through the Church but are unable to reflect it directly, explicitly through their own consciousnesses. "What a real pity that we are not Catholics, that this dazzling monument is not something more to us than a mere splendid show!" says Brooke Evans, the young American tourist in Italy in James' 1870 story "Travelling Companions." "What a pleasant thing it must be, in such a church as this, for two good friends to say their prayers together!"

In all his work, James insists on the cultural importance of churches, clergymen, and communal worship; cultures need visible signs of transcendent values. In 1904, James visited the United States after a twenty-one-year absence. In *The American Scene*, published after the visit, James identified churches as the element most notably missing from the American cityscape. Washington, D.C., he wrote, "bristles with national affirmations," but "you . . . find yourself wondering what it is you so oddly miss . . . till it at last occurs to you that the existence of a religious faith on the part of the people is not even remotely suggested." In New York, James expressed horror that Trinity Church had been "cruelly overtopped and [rendered] barely distinguishable" by surrounding skyscrapers—and, worse, that the men who had built the skyscrapers were trustees of the church, thus serving "that inexorable law of the growing invisibility of churches, their everywhere reduced or abolished *presence*, which is nine-tenths of their virtue." In America, an "ancient treasure of precious vessels," the church, has "been converted . . . into small change, . . . dollars and nickels."

In Philadelphia, by contrast, James was pleased to find Independence Hall's clear expression of transcendent moral values: "The collective consciousness, in however empty an air, gasps for a relation, as intimate as possible, to something superior, something as central as possible . . . [around] which its life may revolve." James lamented the change in the social tone in New York and longed for the days "when the best manners had been the best kindness." What might the city have become if it too had found "some power not of the purse" around which to build its life?

In all his writing, James himself is loath to judge. Princess Maggie, John Marcher, and Stransom do that themselves—judging themselves and others by how much they see, how firmly they reject egotism, how deeply they drink of the wine of consciousness flowing from the fountain of being. Maggie gives others full play until the moral implications of their deeds reveal themselves fully—as God does with us. FT

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Books in Review

Murder in the Vicarage

THE LIGHTHOUSE
by P.D. JAMES
Knopf, 352 pages, $25.95

Reviewed by Ralph C. Wood

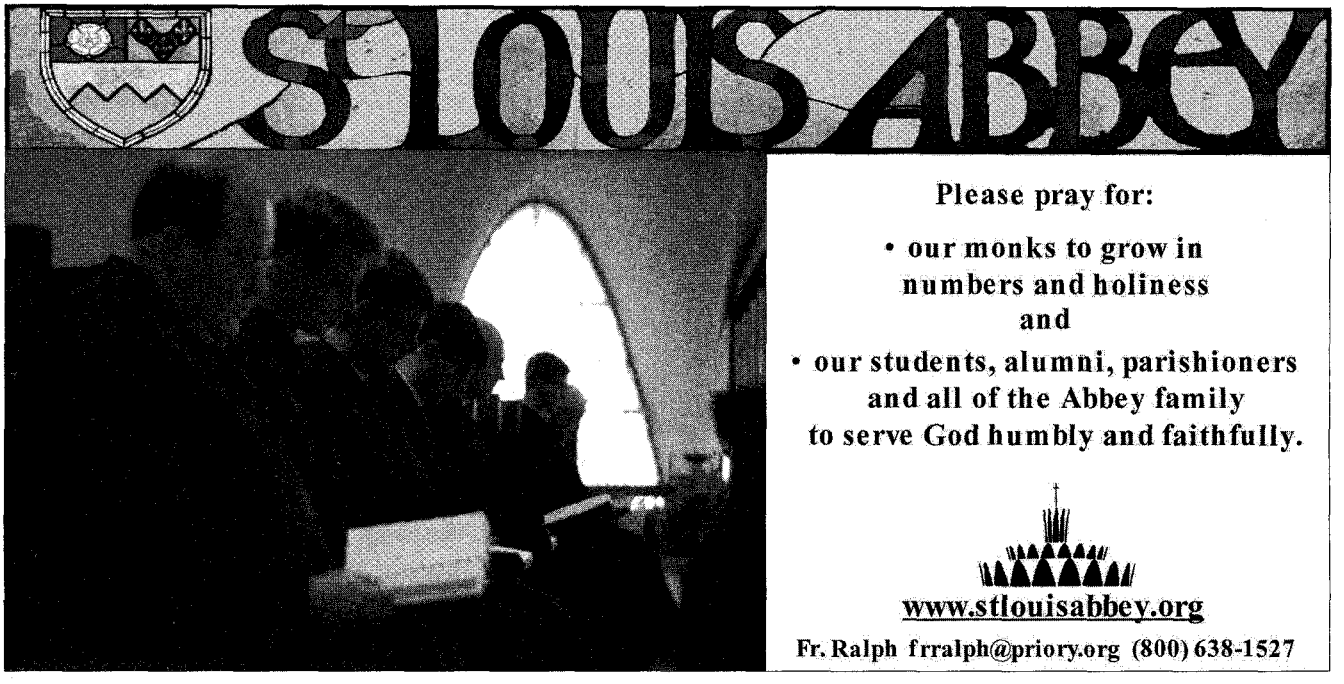
IN HIS CELEBRATED 1948 essay on detective fiction, "The Guilty Vicarage," W.H. Auden argued that the appeal of crime novels lies in their "dialectic of innocence and guilt." A seemingly edenic community is discovered to have a murderer in its midst. Various false clues and secondary murders cast suspicion on nearly everyone and thus reveal the falseness of the community's innocence. With the almost miraculous aid of a detective who possesses superior powers of perception, the true criminal is caught and punished, as the community undergoes a catharsis that cleanses its partial guilt and restores its innocence. Hence Auden's conclusion that the detective story, though a worthy genre, is a peculiarly Protestant form of magic: a "fantasy of escape," built on the Socratic daydream that "sin is ignorance."

Auden rightly describes the pattern that obtains in the huge preponderance of crime novels—though there have always been some that elude the easy escapist comfort. The novels of P.D. James, for instance, mainly because her victims are not entirely innocent nor her villains entirely guilty. A complex admixture of good and evil lies at the moral and religious center of her work. Blindness to the invisible suffering of others leads the innocent to premature condemnations, while a sharp eye for injustice prompts the guilty to commit heinous acts of their own.

P.D. James' most recent work, *The Lighthouse*, is her thirteenth Adam Dalgliesh novel, and its final pages are suffused with a valedictory and elegiac quality. Dalgliesh and his associate Kate Miskin are reflecting on the quiet transformation they have undergone while working on Combe Island, the Cornish retreat where they have come to solve two especially gruesome murders. Having long resented her unhappy past, Miskin at last sees herself as a woman with her own bright and independent future, rather than as a mere detective inspector doomed to unrequited love for Dalgliesh. He, in turn, after many years of bachelorhood prompted by wrenching grief over the death of his first wife in childbirth, is finally engaged to Emma Lavenham.

If James follows the example of her mentor, Dorothy L. Sayers, she will have them marry and perhaps even accompany them on their honeymoon, as Sayers followed Lord Peter Wimsey and his new bride in *Busman's Honeymoon*. Yet romantic love has never featured prominently

RALPH C. WOOD *is University Professor of Theology and Literature at Baylor University.*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in James' work, and Dalgliesh himself declares near the end, "Truth between lovers should be written, to be weighed at leisure and in solitude, or—better—spoken face to face."

The Lighthouse also contains surprising autobiographical allusions not often found in the reticent James. The murder victim, Nathan Oliver, is an aging but still celebrated writer whose last novel received only modest reviews and who thus fears that his literary talent has gone into irrevocable decline. James herself is now aged eighty-six, and her previous novel, *The Murder Room*, did not measure up to the excellence of her best work: *Innocent Blood*, *A Taste for Death*, *Devices and Desires*, *Original Sin*, *A Certain Justice*, *The Children of Men*, *Death in Holy Orders*. Hence the poignancy of Oliver's plight, as the octogenarian James enters his mind to provide a Pascalian meditation on absence and abandonment:

> He felt immeasurably small, as if his mind and body had shrunk and he was alone on a spinning globe looking up into immensity. The stars were there, moving according to the laws of the physical world, but their brilliance was only in his mind, a mind that was failing him, and eyes that could no longer clearly see. He was only sixty-eight, but slowly, inexorably, his light was fading. He felt immensely lonely, as if no other living thing existed. There was no help anywhere on earth, nor on those dead spinning worlds with their illusionary brightness. No one would be listening if he gave way to this almost irresistible impulse [to kill himself] and shouted loud into the unfeeling night, *Don't take away my words! Give me back my words!*

We must hope that *The Lighthouse* does not contain James' final words. For four and a half decades, beginning with *Cover Her Face* in 1962, she has produced a splendid prose built on elegant periodic sentences while also giving careful attention to detail and

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thus preserving the dense particularity of her characters and crime scenes. James also has a fine moralist's eye for the modern scene, confronting our most intractable problems: from urban blight to terrorist crime, from sexual libertinism to fashionable multiculturalism, from epidemic disease to secularized Christianity and the emptying of the churches.

She has thus offered enduring portraits of small enclaves in which people who have been thrown into close relationship, either by employment or circumstance, make their daily lives together, often in the abiding kindness that leads to friendship, but also in the enduring enmity that leads to murder. She has also evoked the gritty density of the urban London landscape as well as the rural tranquility of coastal England. She is indeed almost Dickensian in her creation of the atmosphere that evokes the character of the crimes. Over the years, Dalgliesh—her poet-sleuth whose understanding of human nature enables him to unravel the skein of clues that solves the crimes—has himself matured, so that he speaks with increasing wisdom, as when he notes, in *The Lighthouse*, the relationship between his poetry and his detective work: "Wasn't it in the rich soil of a murder investigation, in the fascination of the gradual unveiling of truth, in shared exertion and the prospect of danger, and in the pitiableness of desperate and broken lives that his poetry put out its shoots?"

This last phrase, "the pitiableness of desperate and broken lives," marks the moral center of James' work. An unapologetic Anglican, James is not embarrassed by the word "pity" and its cognates. Over and again, James creates characters who are not egregiously evil so much as they are desperately pitiable. They have not determined to wreak misery in sheer nihilistic perversity so much as to rectify past wrongs or to revenge festering resentments or to protect endangered loved ones. No one can live without loving, but loving the wrong thing at the wrong time or for the wrong reason produces most of the world's wretchedness. "People mean well when they are doing worst," declares Kate Miskin, Dalgliesh's assistant, who has had an entirely secular upbringing but whose work as a detective has given her religious insight.

STOIC ENDURANCE IS one of the chief features of James' work, for she regards it as necessary for a religious no less than a secular life. In her autobiographical memoir, *Time to Be in Earnest*, James salutes our forebears who stoically endured their unblissful marriages, assured that silent suffering also has its rewards: "They had a far smaller expectation of happiness, admittedly, and a far lesser tendency to regard happiness as a right. All our brightly minted social reforms, the sexual liberation since the war, the guilt-free divorce, the ending of the stigma of illegitimacy, have had their shadow side. Today we have a generation of children more disturbed, more unhappy, more criminal, indeed more suicidal than in any previous era. The sexual liberation of adults has been bought at a high price and it is not the adults who have paid it."

Absent the love of God, James implies, human love also withers. Absent human love grounded in divine charity, marriages are difficult to sustain. Absent marital and thus parental love, children are orphaned in the ultimate, no less than the immediate, sense. Indeed, orphanhood is the moral and spiritual condition of many of James' murderers.

Murder is the unique crime, James often observes, because it destroys its victims. It makes justice impossible—to them at least. Having always aroused doubt, murderous death now makes skepticism acute, as in

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Dalgliesh's poignant reflection on the corpse of Nathan Oliver:

> He was struck, as he had been as a young detective constable on his first murder case, by the absoluteness of death. Once the body was cold and rigor mortis had started its inevitable and predictable progress, it was almost impossible to believe that this stiffening encumbrance of flesh, bone and muscle had ever been alive. No animal was ever as dead as was a man. Was it that so much more had been lost with that final stiffening, not only the animal passions and the urges of the flesh, but the whole encompassing life of the human mind? This body had at least left a memorial to its existence [in Oliver's prize-winning novels], but even that rich legacy of imagination and verbal felicities seemed a childish bagatelle in the face of such ultimate negativity.

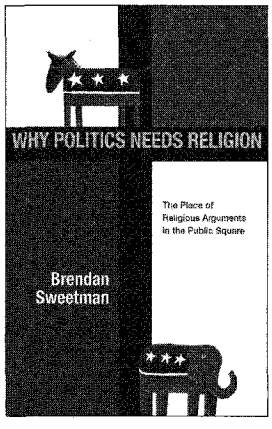
The incorrigible fact of human transience often prompts James' characters to seek solace in the relative immutability of carefully crafted *things*, especially artifacts from the distant past. Dalgliesh is troubled that he has acquired so few of them, wondering what will happen to his own family photographs and furniture when he is gone: "Our parents' generation carried the past memorialized in paint, porcelain, and wood; we cast it off. Even our national history is taught or remembered in terms of the worst we did, not the best." James also has her characters stave off the irreversibility of death by noticing the changeless flow of the Thames through London or the lastingness of the skies and seas and stars: "The darkness would have been absolute but for the stars. Never had they seemed to Kate more multitudinous, more glittering or so close. They made of the furry darkness a mysterious luminosity."

Yet neither P.D. James nor her protagonists can find final refuge in nature mysticism. Her own stance can be seen, instead, in Dalgliesh's confession about the sources of his art: "For him as a poet, beauty in nature, in human faces, had never been enough. He had always needed Yeats' foul rag-and-bone shop of the heart." James herself has observed, "The greatest mystery of all is the human heart, and that is the mystery with which all good novelists are concerned." The heart is the region of feeling and emotion because it is first of all the locus of our desires and habits. James is obsessed with murder as the crime that most reveals the heart's disordered loves.

It is a disorder that, in James' fiction, afflicts the virtuous as well as the vicious. If murderers often have a pulpy core—sentimental and self-pitying about their own grievances or the dangers faced by their loved ones—the rest are usually flint-hearted. Writers, for instance, can view the human scene as an object of cold study—as providing mere data for their craft. Adam Dalgliesh worries whether, rather frigidly, he has made crime detection the basis for his art, whether his own poetry has "its roots in the pain, horror and pathetic detritus of the tragic and broken lives which made up his working life." Nathan Oliver's copyeditor also laments the gelid quality of his boss's imagination: "I don't think he loves anyone but himself. He's a conduit. Emotion flows through him. He can describe but he can't feel, not for other people."

Either mushiness or hardness of heart prompts nearly all personal sins, James suggests, from the great to the small, from murder to gossip. The only antidote lies in the pity that seeks firm justice while acknowledging that everyone, even the worst, suffers irremediably. What we do with our suffering is what matters. Our sins most often spring not from mere ignorance, James teaches, but from false innocence. Despite Auden's salutary warning, therefore, such detective fiction as hers enables us to confront our real guilt.

A MORE-CHURCHED STATE?



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The Truth About Lies

Truth: A Guide
by Simon Blackburn
Oxford University Press,
272 pages, $25

Reviewed by Thomas S. Hibbs

Simon Blackburn's ability to be at once engaging and rigorous is unrivaled in contemporary philosophy. As a guide to what we ought ultimately to think about truth, however, his latest, *Truth: A Guide*, is much less impressive. Its modest middle ground between absolutists and relativists, a turning of our attention away from grand theoretical accounts of truth to the normative conditions of truth woven into concrete practices, has been advanced with more vigor and more imagination by any number of other philosophers, from Alasdair MacIntyre to John McDowell and Bernard Williams.

Blackburn's goal is meek indeed; he simply wants to curb a narrow set of vices or what he takes to be cognitive dysfunctions—you know, the dogmatic proponents of "astrology, prophecy . . . flying saucers, voodoo, angel visits, alien abductions," along with orthodox Christians and anyone who voted for Bush and Blair.

Perhaps because he deems absolutism obviously indefensible, Blackburn devotes most of his attention to the flaws and dangers of relativism. The supposition, for example, that belief is nothing more than fancy is undermined by the common way in which we contrast the two. Contradiction is unimportant, indeed not even a relevant category description, for fancy, while it is a typical way of describing opposed beliefs. Belief is to fancy as history is to fiction, for in fancy and fiction "the brakes are off." In his careful analysis of the use of "perspective" as a metaphor for relativism, Blackburn shows that perspective presupposes an identifiable set of relationships or coordinates specifying the locations of viewer and object. What relativism needs as a metaphor is more akin to epistemic vertigo, the loss of all perspective, which Blackburn detects in Nietzsche's penchant for Heraclitean flux.

Blackburn has little trouble disposing of the incoherence of Richard Rorty's wanting to shift our attention from copying, the way the mind mirrors or fails to mirror objective reality, to coping, the ability of human language to aid us in getting on with living. The problem is not just that Rorty conflates all conceptions of truth into a crude account of the mind's copying what is outside it. The real problem is that Rorty wants to deny truth while still holding to distinctions about "better informed" or "more enlightened" descriptions. Rorty makes the far from pellucid inference that, since our current state of knowledge may be provisional, the appropriate attitude toward all our knowledge, especially toward what he calls our ultimate vocabulary, should be one of irony. Blackburn retorts that just because the maps we use to find our way across a terrain have problems, we need not regard the guidance they offer with ironic detachment. Indeed, that would be to misunderstand the function of maps and to invite irreparable confusion.

Blackburn's modest proposal owes something to Wittgenstein, whom Blackburn wants to rescue from the accusation that he is a "quietist," one who, in his task of "giving philosophy rest," wanted to put an end to inquiry and ended up conflating all differences and arguments into a "seamless web of language" over which we can exercise no rational control. Rather, Wittgenstein called for the hard, detailed work of describing what it is we are doing in a variety of contexts, what Wittgenstein himself called "language games" and what others, perhaps more accurately, have called "practices." The standard for truth as for other things is typically built into these preexisting practices; it is not something that floats free of specific contexts. Blackburn himself is very much given to this, by now, hardly novel way out of the debate between absolutists and relativists. But Blackburn has so little to say about a developed account of this alternative that the book's positive thesis is a disappointment.

Despite the allusions to Wittgenstein, Blackburn relies more heavily on a very odd pair of philosophical guides: David Hume and Francis Bacon, the twin analysts of "cognitive dysfunction." Each chapter begins with an aphorism from Bacon's *New Organon* on the idols that infect the human intellect in its attempt to reckon with things. Far from dissolving the dispute between absolutists and relativists, Bacon is one of the most strident advocates of the absolutist position. In this respect, he differs not at all from Descartes, except that he wants to ground his quest for certainty and utility in a new method of empirical observations, while Descartes is the founder of rationalism. Bacon is also English, not French—a fact that may have impressed Blackburn. Hume, by contrast, is hardly an absolutist. Instead, he would seem to be the archetype of the quietist, who thinks in the end that there are no debates worth having. As Blackburn aptly quotes him, the only remedy for the contradictions between philosophy and common sense is "carelessness and inattention."

Hume's despairing sense of insuperable arbitrariness at the foundations of human thought informs much of recent philosophy, on both sides of the continental-analytic divide. With respect to the issue of truth, Anglo-American analytic

Thomas S. Hibbs *is Distinguished Professor of Ethics and dean of the honors college at Baylor University. His books include* Virtue's Splendor and Shows About Nothing: Nihilism in Popular Culture from The Exorcist to Seinfeld.

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philosophers tend to look with derisive scorn upon continental philosophers, whom they blame for soft, if not perverse, thinking. But, as Blackburn notes, this is more a matter of stylistic differences in the manner of doing philosophy than it is a substantive divergence over the question of truth. The "anything-goes philosophy" is the consensus that no matter how rigorous we may be in laying out what does and does not follow from our starting points, the starting points themselves are arbitrary, mere matters of philosophical preference. It derives a good bit of support from twentieth-century analytic philosophy. "Logos," Blackburn observes, has been "as absent from Harvard and Oxford as from Paris and Tübingen."

Still, Blackburn has not moved far from the logophobia that infects so much of philosophy—just far enough to deflate the radical deflationists, who leave us rational folks with no defense against spin from the likes of "Blair and Bush" and, well, all those damn Christians. This may help to explain the distance from Wittgenstein and the coziness with Hume. For Blackburn's taste—and it is hard to see it as anything more than taste—Wittgenstein leaves too much in place. He may also be too open to mysticism and the religious impulse.

Had he not had such low and blatantly political aims in mind, Blackburn might have given more attention to the most promising account of truth philosophers have pursued in recent years: the virtues of truthfulness. At the outset, Blackburn sets aside Bernard Williams' thesis that the "crisis of truth" is a matter of our losing hold of a set of virtues of truthfulness. The worry, Blackburn urges, is not about the "sincerity and anxious care for accuracy of those in the field," but instead that we are "trapped in partial or perspectival or outright illusory and fictional views, with little or no chance of realizing our plight."

The problem here, as Blackburn himself intimates in his critique of Donald Davidson, is with the modern project of asking what justifies belief in the abstract. Stanley Cavell trenchantly made the point years ago that modern philosophy begins with a very strange sort of doubt: not doubt about the veracity of persons, but doubt about the world. Blackburn himself urges that we should focus on what justifies persons in their beliefs. We check this by investigating a range of things: a person's "explorations and investigations, his situation, his observations, experiences."

In such an investigation, we would try to detect the presence or absence of the relevant cognitive and moral virtues. Blackburn gestures in this direction a few times in the book. For example, in his discussion of Rorty, he astutely observes that Rorty *both* posits that the question "Does he love truth?" is as unanswerable as the query "Is he saved?" *and* adds that we rightly distrust those who are "unconversable, incurious, and self-absorbed." Blackburn notes that the latter points us in the direction of a set of intellectual vices and virtues.

Blackburn nearly launches a fertile investigation into intellectual virtue. Comparing ancient with modern skepticism, Blackburn observes that, while today's relativists see skepticism as a "green light to believe what they like with as much conviction and force as they like," in antiquity skepticism was a way of life that led to "tranquility of mind, *ataraxia*," rooted in a suspension of belief. What he does not add is that the ancient skeptics made a case for their way of life as supreme, as most fulfilling the possibilities for human happiness. Moreover, while his comments about reading Platonic dialogues generally never transcend the derisive comments of a clever, anti-philosophical freshman, he does offer one helpful comment about Socrates, namely, that he was not a dogmatist and that his example shows that you "can admit the authority of truth without supposing that you possess it." Now, this is a suggestive proposal indeed, one that might lead to an interesting discussion of how philosophy might overcome its current logophobia.

In the case neither of the skeptics nor of Socrates is the modesty concerning truth predicated on alienation from logos; instead, an orientation to logos, understood as the best way of life for human beings, undergirds judgments regarding better and worse ways of life and restraint regarding peremptory claims to having comprehended the truth. That such a philosophically foundational conception of truthfulness finds no place in what otherwise might seem an exhaustive overview tells us a good bit about the continuing limitations of Anglo-American philosophy.

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The Book of Splendor

The Zohar: Pritzker Edition, Vol. 1
translated by Daniel C. Matt
Stanford University Press,
584 pages, $49.95

Reviewed by Laurance Wieder

Daniel Matt's landmark translation of the *Zohar* from the original tongues into English is a tour de force of scholarship and linguistic imagination—in the service of heaven. It is also the necessary step to bring into plain view a text whose meanings have been hidden even from those equipped to sound out the words.

Sefer ha-Zohar—variously known as the *Zohar*, the *Book of Radiance*, or the *Book of Splendor*—is the central text of Jewish Kabbalah. Written by Moses de Leon (1250–1305), a Castilian Jew and member of a circle of Spanish kabbalists, the manuscript appeared and circulated piecemeal over the last two decades of the thirteenth century. When Ferdinand and Isabella expelled all unconverted Jews from their reconquered Spain in 1492, the kabbalists carried the *Zohar* with them to refuges in North Africa, Turkey, Babylon, and Palestine.

The *Zohar* is an enigmatic text. Moses de Leon wrote his book in a literary Aramaic that was never spoken in any part of Arabic or Roman Spain, which he mixed with biblical Hebrew. The text is a commentary on the Five Books of Moses, but the commentary is not intended to lay bare the meaning of the text, as does, say, the French medieval rabbinic commentary by Rashi. Rather, it records an oral tradition of the inner meanings (the "Divine Chariot") of the Torah taught by Moses to the elders in the wilderness and transmitted through Joshua and the judges to the prophets and down to the sages of the great assembly.

The last generation of the sages was martyred by the Romans in the middle of the second century in the suppression of the Bar Kokhba rebellion. Faced with the prospective annihilation of the oral tradition, Rabbi Yehuda ha-Nasi compiled and edited the Talmud so that the evolved wisdom of Israel would be preserved. All is not settled in the Talmud, which teaches method as well as matter, and its unfinished business provides topics and models for discussion to this day.

Nor did all the sages of the great assembly perish like Rabbi Akiba, flayed alive with the *Shema* ("Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one") on his lips. Rabbi Shimon bar Yohai and his son Rabbi Elazar concealed themselves for ten years in a cave. After they emerged, a circle of companions dedicated to discussion of the Torah formed around them. The *Zohar* is Moses de Leon's record of their commentary, or midrash.

By the middle of the thirteenth century, this other oral tradition was in danger. The teaching handed down from Rabbi Shimon and his company of scholars to the kabbalists of Castile, Andalusia, and Catalonia (along with a library of mystical texts that are known only because the *Zohar* alludes to them) was now caught between the struggles of Latin Catholicism and Arabic Islam.

One century before, Moses Maimonides wrote his introduction to the Talmud in Arabic, the language of philosophy and governance, for the cultured populations of all faiths. The earlier Hebrew poets of Moorish Spain also composed their prose works in Arabic, like Jehudah Halevi's defense of Judaism, *al-Kuzari*, or the philosophical treatises of Solomon ibn Gabirol. Moses de Leon, however, wrote in a literary Aramaic unknown to southern Spain. The artificial dialect conceals its meaning in plain sight: To read the original is to be confounded. Even to be introduced, the *Zohar* must be coaxed from its linguistic cave.

Such translators and expounders have a long history. Sefad, a village located on the Sea of Galilee, was home in the sixteenth century to a circle of influential kabbalists. Chief among them was Rabbi Isaac Luria, though he taught there only for two years before his early death at thirty-eight. Luria was the first man in nearly three centuries inspired and confident enough to extract the kernel from the *Zohar*'s Aramaic husk.

Luria left no writings, only disciples. As transmitted by his chief disciple, Hayyim Vital, Lurianic Kabbalah found in the *Zohar*, among other things, a key to unlock the coming of Moshiach and the Jews' deliverance. Luria's teachings guided Nathan of Gaza, a scholar of the mid-seventeenth century, eminent as a healer of sick souls. When the disturbed Sabbatai Sevi approached Rabbi Nathan for relief from his messianic delusions, Nathan instead played Elijah and proclaimed Sevi the messiah. The kabbalist justified every strange act of his messiah's career, up to and including Sevi's conversion to Islam.

The significant portion of Eastern European Jewry that embraced this messiah over orthodox rabbinic opposition could not, however, follow him into apostasy. From the embers of their disappointment, Hasidic Judaism was born. The pious retained the habits of the kabbalistic circle directed by an inspired teacher, with the *Zohar* as a central text.

Only in the past fifty years or so have the peculiar gifts of the Hasidic communities and their stories of the Baal Shem-Tov been appreciated in the West. Nineteenth-century enlightened Jewry, as exemplified by Heinrich Graetz's six-volume standard *History of the Jews*, dismissed Kabbalah as *shtetl* superstition inimical to modern thought, unacceptable even to the philosophical Talmudism derived from Maimonides. In other words, Kabbalah was an embarrass-

Laurance Wieder *teaches in the Bachelor of Interdisciplinary Studies program at the University of Virginia in Charlottesville.*

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ment to those who would assimilate, to live in the present and the world.

But in the early 1920s, the German scholar Gershom Scholem emigrated to Palestine, where he pursued his study of Jewish mysticism until his death in 1989. Facing down the received condescension of reasonable Judaism, Scholem wrote a number of volumes that restored intellectual respectability to Jewish mystical literature. Scholem's *Sabbatai Sevi: The Mystical Messiah*, published in Hebrew in 1957 and in English in the early 1970s, placed the *Zohar*, Lurianic Kabbalah, and messianic longing in historical and intellectual context. Scholem's pioneering scholarship was also the departure point for a new generation of kabbalists, speculative and practical. Some, like Moshe Idel, have explored the origins and experience of Jewish mysticism. Others have parsed and translated the text.

Sefer ha-Zohar knocked around in manuscript for two centuries before it was first published in book form, in Italy around 1559. The Torah commentary ran to three volumes; other, fragmentary commentaries were collected in separate editions. Because Moses de Leon's work emerged episodically, and the author never had an opportunity to redact his own manuscript, the order of presentation has been a subject of dispute.

The first translation of the *Zohar* into English, by Harry Sperling and Maurice Simon, was published in 1934. The translators' professed desire to render the *Zohar* intelligible led them to omit passages and to organize the apparent jumble typographically and paragraphically. Their prose, they wrote, attempts a faithful account of every word in some of those "highly enigmatical" parts where "in the absence of an authentic tradition their true meaning is a matter of conjecture." It reads like the work of well-educated Englishmen wishing not to sound over-abrupt.

Another edition available to the English reader is the 1989 translation of Isaiah Tishby's three-volume *The Wisdom of the Zohar: An Anthology of Texts*. Tishby first translated the *Zohar* into Hebrew, then arranged the midrash thematically rather than in scriptural order. Tishby comments extensively on the Zoharic passages. His book clarifies in a way that the Soncino *Zohar* does not. It is Jerusalem-centered rather than London-based. But for all its welcome illumination, Tishby's *Zohar* comes to us at the third remove: from Aramaic through Hebrew into English.

Tishby is not alone. Of the twenty-six (by my count) translations of the *Zohar* into modern languages, seven are into Hebrew. There are two Ger-

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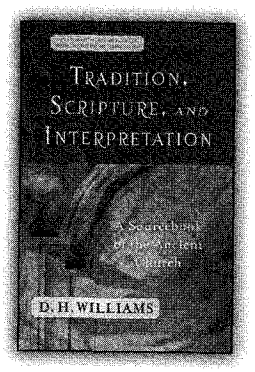

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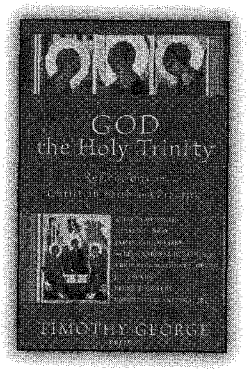

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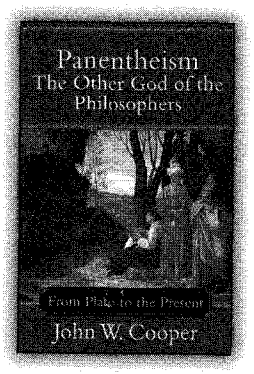

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man translations, one French, and the rest are in English; all are twentieth century. Michael Berg's twenty-three-volume translation is an English version of Rabbi Yehudah Ashlag's mid-twentieth-century Hebrew translation and commentary. The sole "older" translation of the *Zohar* is the 1684 *Kabbala Denudata*, in Latin. So modern Jews (like their medieval European counterparts wishing to acquaint themselves with Maimonides' *The Guide of the Perplexed*) have had to wait for the *Zohar* to be translated into Hebrew.

Unlike most books, the *Zohar* treats language like a thing, a material condensation or emanation of the Divine. For Moses de Leon, the spoken word was the creative instrument. Letters of the Hebrew alphabet themselves possess numerical and visual-formal properties. Their numerical and pictorial relations constitute an atomic or genetic structure, an invisible dimension active in the making of this world—and the other world, as well.

Daniel Matt's translation opens with a diagram of the ten *Sefirot*: the schema that represents the crowns or emanations of the Divine, the attributes and body parts, the male and female of both this world and the world to come. Every work about the *Zohar* begins with a discussion of this figure, which is an overdetermined and vastly more complex predecessor of the European Renaissance's white-magical astrological Vitruvian man. It summarizes the universe in a glyph.

Supplementing this bewildering diagram of kabbalist wisdom, Matt offers the bedrock acoustic of speech itself. His writing insists on its status as living language, even as it hides behind the appeal to tradition or its profession as a translation. He has invented an English *Zohar* that sounds like literary Aramaic in the same way that Ezra Pound invented an English poetry that sounds like Chinese. Both midrash and poetry are ancient novelties.

Sometimes it's hard to tell midrash from a poem. For example: "Rabbi Elazar said, 'When the blessed Holy One created the world, it was on condition: "When Israel appears, if they accept the Torah, fine; if not, I will reduce you back to chaos." The world was not firmly established until Israel stood at Mount Sinai and accepted Torah; then the world stood firm. Ever since that day, the blessed Holy One has been creating worlds. What are they? Human couplings, for since then the blessed Holy One has been matchmaking, proclaiming: "The daughter of so-and-so for so-

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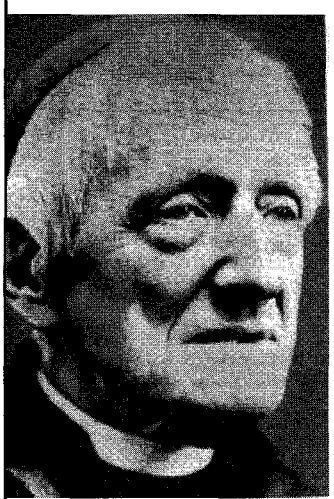

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and-so!" These are the worlds He creates.'" This English literary Aramaic uses concrete language and figures of speech that will strike the ear as odd—but that's because odd is what's going on. Despite its advanced learning, the voice retains its tribal accent.

In place of assumptions about the Talmudic, mathematical, and hermeneutic sophistication of readers, Matt offers an exhaustive commentary and apparatus in his footnotes. The dialogue between the text and notes generates the real music of this work. Sometimes the notes expand the gnomic text; sometimes the notes connect the narrative and descriptive events of the text with the schematic cosmological plan or the hermeneutics of interpretation. Sometimes a story told in the text is answered with another story in the footnotes.

Typographically, the text of this English *Zohar* rides above the translator's commentary, like the upper world above the lower, or the world we live in and the world to come. Every time a fundamental principle is invoked in the text, the note cites the principle explicitly and points forward and backward to other appearances. So certain notes recur, such as "If one comes to defile himself, he is provided an opening; if one comes to purify himself, he is assisted," or "The world on high needs the arousal of the world below."

It is not easy to believe that the life one has is the life one chooses. Understanding how the world to come is always present and how the creative source depends on and responds to us is a still-harder stretch.

But reading the *Zohar* affords even a nonobservant, speculative Jew the opportunity to participate in an act of divine imagination. Moses de Leon does more than tell stories through old rabbis, though the stories do smile, and Torah glints like a gem in a sunny streambed. His writing is a ladder between the here and the hereafter, between longing and fulfillment, between the head and the heart.

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Beauty Is as Beauty Does

On Beauty
by Zadie Smith
Penguin, 464 pages, $15 (paperback)

Reviewed by J.A. Gray

In *On Beauty*, British writer Zadie Smith has turned her attention to the post–September 11 United States and has been widely praised for the result, which is a big comic novel that builds a topical tale on a classic foundation. Cleverly paying homage to E.M. Forster, she has moved his *Howards End*—the archetypal story of liberals versus conservatives in an imperial democracy—from Edwardian England to George W. Bushean Boston and entered into our nation's "culture wars" by embodying them in the clash of two families in an American university town. Even better, Smith has added to Forster's old-fashioned tale some up-to-date racial material, making her conservative family black Caribbeans, while her liberal family is composed of mixed-race African Americans. Reviewers have declared that the resulting "delicious complications" are rendered in writing that has "stylistic flair," with "leisured cadences and playful figuration" and "many beautiful descriptions."

I'm sorry to say that I'm left unpersuaded by claims for the novel's virtues, beginning with the virtues of its prose. Lavish in quantity and radiating self-satisfaction, garrulous yet precious, it is a prose apparently indifferent to its actual effects, whether it is describing landscapes ("The sky had misted over slightly, allowing the sun to cast itself in a misleading godly role. It shone beneficence in thin rods of Renaissance light, thrusting through a landscaped cloud that seemed designed for the purpose") or persons ("She was neatly made with the minimum of material. When she moved a finger, you could trace the motion through pulleys of veins that went all the way up her slender arms and shoulders to her neck, itself elegantly creased like the lungs of an accordion"). Forced images and near misses abound. There's this: "'Monty Kipps?' repeated Kiki, each word encased in the double ripple of a dead laugh. She felt shock shudder through Jerome, radiating out." And this: "Kiki turned to her husband with a thesis for a face, of

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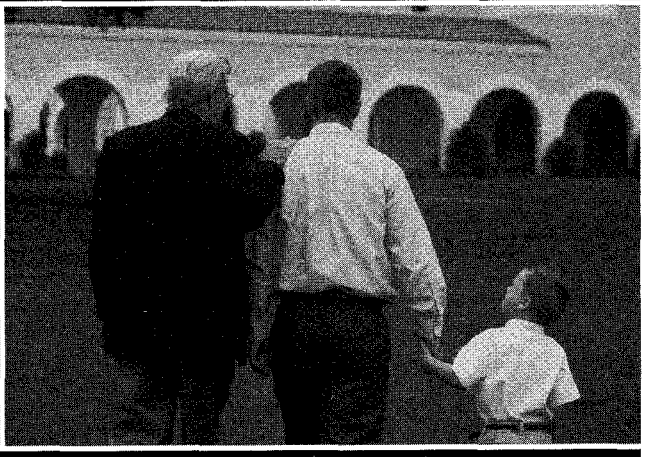

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which only Howard could know every line and reference." And this: "Claire's tensile features pulled themselves tight with glee."

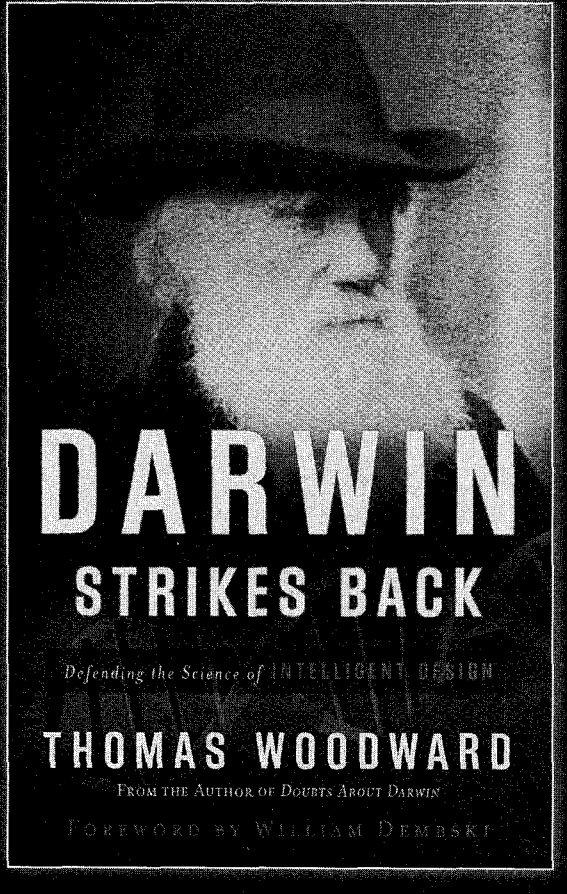
My tensile features did not pull themselves tight with glee as I labored through 440 pages of this stuff, determined to read the book despite her repellent industriousness. She is an indefatigable writer who seems to lack the sense for audience that can make a writer into an author. Her output is generous, but she occupies each page so completely that she leaves no room for the reader. Virginia Woolf once observed that "a book is not made of sentences laid end to end, but of sentences built, if an image helps, into arcades or domes"—that is, into places where a reader may enter. Smith's book is made of sentences laid end to end, coupled together, and pulled along unstoppably, interminably. To read *On Beauty* is to be stuck at a level railroad crossing, watching boxcars of novelistic material go racketing through.

This noisy forwardness will remind no one of E.M. Forster, who not only wrote competently but in many places in *Howards End* exhibits precision, suggestiveness, and genuine lyricism. More important than this difference in style is a difference in substance, however. Forster's novel explores a fundamental and perennial problem in democratic societies: the relation between the business class and the intellectual class, and it does so with passion and a surprising degree of fairness. (D.H. Lawrence scolded Forster for "glorifying those business people.")

Instead of following Forster's lead and creating some serious comedy for our time, Smith chooses to toy with stale stereotypes—hypocritical Christians, inhumane academics—in which even she, to judge by her careless handling of them, is not much interested.

Forster's novel of 1910 depicts some attractive liberals (two orphaned sisters who live by a code of "personal relations" above all) in confrontation with some unattractive conservatives (a powerful mercantile family that trusts in "telegrams and anger"). The liberals, though badly overmatched, emerge as the moral victors, and the prize is theirs by virtue of their virtue, the prize being a country estate called Howards End (which, of course, represents England, or, more precisely, the soul of England).

Liberal readers of the book have generally been pleased with this out-



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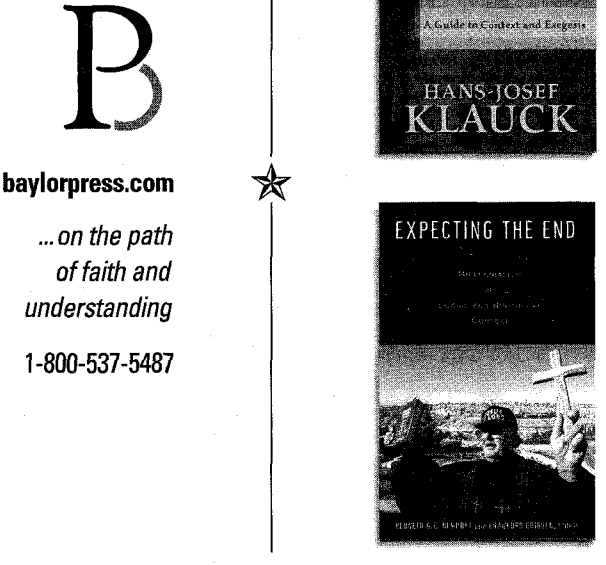
come. But Forster also sets a deeper problem: He makes clear that both the commercial-imperialist crowd and the intellectual-cosmopolitan crowd, antagonists though they be, are fellow members of the stockholding crowd. In a word, they all have money. His liberal heroine stands out because she faces liberalism's need for money to sustain itself. "More and more," says Margaret, "I refuse to draw my income and sneer at those who guarantee it." This opens her to fateful intercourse with the capitalists, one of whom she eventually marries. The novel teaches, furthermore, that classes without money are not merely disabled but are fatally impaired. The moneyless character, a lowly clerk who presumes to ask the commercial crowd for some modest employment and the literary crowd for a modicum of culture, is given neither. He drops dead of his penury—the diagnosis is a "diseased heart"—on the very doorstep of Howards End.

This was a great theme for a novel set in England then, and it's even better for one set in America today. In 1910, plausible dreams of replacing capitalism were still more or less innocently incubating, but, in the years since, they have all run their nightmare course. Yet even as capitalism has proven itself, contempt for it among its beneficiaries has grown. Among American liberals, Margaret's sneer has metastasized into a permanent rictus that its wearers regard not as a deformity but as a mark of distinction. The relation between our intellectual class and our business class is so poisonous as to be toxic to the whole body politic. Meanwhile, globalization makes its growing demands on both classes. We have a worried middle class and an angry underclass, and we find ourselves engaged in a confusing worldwide war in which our main activity on the home front has been to bicker about whom the foreign aggressors hate more, us secular liberals or us religious conservatives.

What does Smith do with all this rich material in her *Howards End Redux*? Not a thing. The war gets ten lines, Jihadism gets none, September 11 is ignored, the suffering body politic doesn't get a glance, and the business class never shows its face. Instead of Forster's contention between intellectuals and businessmen, Smith features an intramural squabble among the intellectuals. On the right, she puts a conservative Christian professor of art history and his family, and on the left she puts another art historian, also *en famille*,



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who is an atheist, materialist, and deconstructionist to his soul, as it were.

This might still have been a fight worth watching, except that Smith has taken care to obviate any possibility of genuine confrontation. She shows in detail that the left-wing prof is a mediocre intellectual and a lying adulterer. She then claims that the right-wing prof is also a fraud and poseur. (I say "she claims" because she doesn't give him the courtesy of a portrayal; she just administers a perfunctory slander or two.) These two men are purportedly set to tangle in their university over some proposed lectures by the right-winger. But we never hear the lectures and the intellectual tussle never comes off. The left-wing prof is found to be sleeping with a student, the right-wing prof ditto, and we fade out on some old news about male sexual hypocrisy.

Coming to this from Forster is a letdown. Forster wrote a deft fable about passionate disputants struggling over the soul of a nation and the course of an empire, and always tantalizingly in prospect between the warring camps was that most daring and fruitful of ceasefires: a marriage. Smith gives us instead a factitious academic quarrel between two men who are hacks as intellectuals, frauds as moralists, and failures as husbands. The relations between the professors' families are equally unfruitful. The one humane connection between them is a trope that Smith has lifted from Forster but has altered tendentiously. In *Howards End*, the dying wife of the right-winger secretly bequeaths her home, and by implication her husband, to the left-wing heroine, Margaret, who, unbeknownst to herself and despite her persona as an emancipated woman, is deeply in need of a husband and a hearth to call her own. In *On Beauty*, by contrast, the bequest of the dying wife to the left-wing heroine, Kiki, is a valuable oil painting from her collection.

The import is clear. In *Howards End*, the dying wife had nothing to offer except her domestic accomplishments, and Forster (yes, he was a notorious mama's boy, but that's neither here nor there) allows this to be a genuine gift: "She was not intellectual, nor even alert, and it was odd that, all the same, she should give the idea of greatness. Margaret, zigzagging with her friends over Thought and Art, was conscious of a personality that transcended their own and dwarfed their activities." Smith, however, can spare no praise for the woman's domestic achievements. In her book, the dying wife is pitiable for having

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wasted her life on home and husband and children—and yet not wholly pitiable, for she has ever so slightly redeemed her existence by means of art, and this art may also redeem the rotten domestic life of the woman to whom she bequeaths it.

In Smith's reworking, then, most of what makes *Howards End* a compelling, organic whole has been altered or ignored, so that her homage falls somewhere between otiose and presumptuous, and in her transatlantic crossing she has simply left behind Forster's most urgent question: To whom does England belong? "Does she belong to those who have moulded her and made her feared by other lands, or to those who have added nothing to her power, but have somehow seen her, seen the whole island at once, lying as a jewel in a silver sea, sailing as a ship of souls, with all the brave world's fleet accompanying her towards eternity?" Smith has not even raised the same question about America, and in the huge cast of characters she so energetically deploys there are none who have "molded America and made her feared" nor any who have "somehow seen her whole." For an avowed disciple of Forster, it is an opportunity missed.

So if *On Beauty* is not really a political novel, maybe it's an academic novel. It has been called a "satire" of academia, but it is not so much a comic skewering as a sour dismissal. Smith shows no affection for the left-wing professoriate (or students) and no respect for the right, and her contempt for the academy as institution seems complete. Her title, *On Beauty,* has many referents in the novel, and among them is the university's willed achievement of aesthetic idiocy: It has made itself a place that can no longer honor or even recognize beauty and certainly cannot teach anyone how to create it. Smith doesn't suggest how to fix this. The best she can do is to send to campus a fantasy figure. Are we to regard him as the vanguard of a rescue? Carl is a black kid from the local ghetto who is auditing an English class. In addition to being handsome, athletic, virile, sincere, and chivalrous, he is a better poet and critic, in his untutored street talk, than anyone the college has to offer. In short, he comes to the university not to receive education but to give it.

Which brings us to the racial matters. Smith has piled a load of them onto the slender template of *Howards End*, and though they spill over the edges of the form, they provide the liveliest scenes in her book. She has well-off black kids striving to act ghetto, ghetto kids striving to come up, black professionals with Haitian housekeepers, black professors and black cab drivers, and lots more interesting stuff. These often draw out a sweetness in Smith's writing, but in her treatments of American racial dynamics I couldn't find much satisfaction or instruction. To most of it there is a synthetic quality (for example, Carl), and at its best it's earnest, Bill Cosby–level sitcom material. The heft, the weight of a novel, that dense yet somehow dancing thing, is not here.

In sum, Smith's big, messy, ambitious book is a lesser work than the smaller, tidier, and doubtless more innocent one with which she has invited comparison. This can't be wholly her fault. Look around at the materials available to her. How does a good sincere liberal write a good sincere liberal novel in a post-liberal world? Her conjuration of *Howards End*, a successful liberal novel, points up the problem. In Forster's day, the materials from which liberal values could be made were lying ready to

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hand in the fairly fresh ruins of the Christian edifice; one had simply to extract the human goods from the broken, discardable Christian husks.

Thus, in *Howards End* (whatever may have been Forster's conscious intention), pieces of the old moral code provide the novel's structure, the need of humans to fulfill that code provides the novel's energy, and over the plotting there lingers, ghostly but still potent, the old theological virtue of hope. A property goes to its true spiritual owner, a bequest is fulfilled despite the world's machinations, a widower conservative is redeemed by marriage to a liberal, a spinster liberal learns to be a wife. Nature and wisdom overcome fear and deceit. There occurs, in a word, that thing that is the core of the liberal faith: progress.

When *On Beauty* at last clanks to a close, however, there is no redemption for the conservative, no wisdom for the liberal. No good thing has been secured, and the regnant discipline is not love but negotiation. Whereas Margaret ended in happy possession of the home bequeathed to her, Kiki is left filing a lawsuit against the right-wing widower for title to her painting. In Forster, the bequest found its way to its true owner by sheer force of spiritual truth. In Smith, possession will be awarded not by nature but by a judge. Is this what the liberal imagination must content itself with imagining these days?

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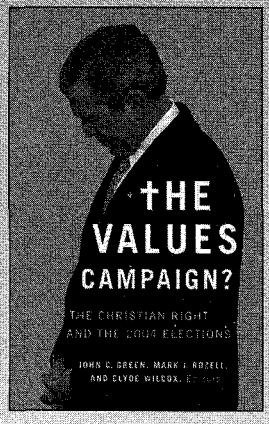

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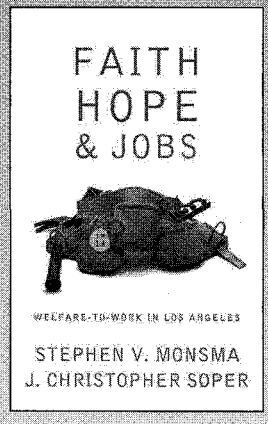

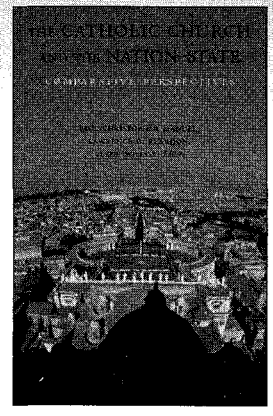

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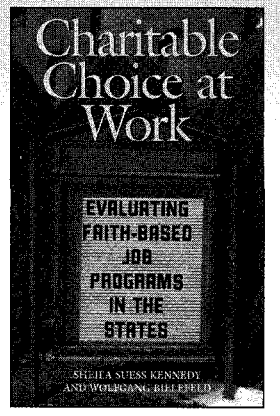
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Confessing Mysticism

The Mysticism of Saint Augustine: Rereading the Confessions
by John Peter Kenney
Routledge, 160 pages, $115

Reviewed by Robert Louis Wilken

For many, Augustine's *City of God* seems a more difficult book than the *Confessions*. It is very long, and its architectonic structure demands that one hold in mind ideas from earlier chapters to negotiate the final stages of the argument. And, of course, it is filled with digressions that seem to wander off in unpredictable directions. But the *Confessions* is surely the more subtle and challenging work, and its autobiographical style can easily lead one astray. This is especially true on a first reading. Captivated by Augustine's mesmerizing prose, the unsuspecting reader can easily become oblivious to his rhetorical strategies.

But it is not only first readers who find the *Confessions* baffling. Even seasoned interpreters have trouble agreeing on basic questions of interpretation—for example, on the book's unity and the relation between the final books and the "autobiographical" books one through nine. One issue of interpretation that has vexed scholars is whether, and in what sense, Augustine is a mystic. This topic was first raised in the middle of the nineteenth century, and it has been debated on and off ever since. As is often the case in scholarly debates, the positions staked out by the experts turn as much on how one understands mysticism as they do on texts from Augustine's writings.

The person who lurks behind the modern discussion of Augustine's mysticism is William James, the American philosopher and author of *The Varieties of Religious Experience*. Like many American religious thinkers of the nineteenth century, James was suspicious of collective religious rituals and institutions. Genuine religion was thought to be a deeply personal experience, a sense of being visited by an ineffable spiritual reality. Mysticism, in this view, is an affair of the individual soul, the subjective feelings of a solitary person.

A Jamesian approach to Augustine was popularized early in the twentieth century in books such as Evelyn Underhill's *Mysticism* and Dean Inge's *Christian Mysticism*. But it gained scholarly support in the writings of distinguished Augustine scholars who were also students of the great Neoplatonic philosopher Plotinus. Every reader of the *Confessions* knows the famous passage where Augustine acknowledges his debt to the "Platonic books," by which he meant the writings of the Neoplatonists. For generations, scholars have debated Augustine's relation to late antique Platonism.

Scholarly attention came to focus on a series of texts in books seven and nine that contained "ascension narratives," presumed accounts of the soul's journey to God. Read with spectacles colored by the sanctioned pieties of our age, it seemed possible to strip the texts of their Christian features to disclose an underlying structure common to all mystics. The effect was to remove Christian theology and practice from their interpretation and to see the Platonic language as more authentic, more capable of depicting a universal religious experience.

In *The Mysticism of Saint Augustine*, John Peter Kenney writes on the far side of two generations of scholarly debate about Augustine's relation to Platonism. He knows the arguments about Augustine's dependence on the Neoplatonists, what he calls an "effort to move away from denominationally based analyses" (theologi-

Robert Louis Wilken *is the William R. Kenan Jr. Professor of History at the University of Virginia.*

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cal interpretations), but he believes that the only way beyond what has become a sterile debate is to view the *Confessions* from the "vantage point of a live spiritual tradition," that is to say, Catholic Christianity. His aim is to see the books of the Platonists as a "point of theological departure rather than merely a source."

This is a challenging agenda, especially when one recalls that a friend of Augustine once wrote of his great delight in reading Augustine's letters because "they speak to me of Christ, of Plato, and of Plotinus." So Kenney's first task is to attend to Plotinus, whom he knows very well. By training, Kenney is a scholar of ancient philosophy, and it is a pleasure to read his exposition of Plotinus' ideas in clear, intelligible language. This is particularly welcome because Plotinus is notoriously difficult. In a few compact chapters, Kenney provides a penetrating account of the central elements of Plotinus' thought.

For Plotinus, human beings are never fully part of the temporal and spatial world. There is always "some of the [soul] in the intelligible realm." Through contemplation, the soul can uncover within itself the presence of a transcendent reality, what Plotinus calls the One. The One, however, is not, as in the biblical tradition, simply an "other": It stands at the apex of a descending order of being, a plurality of divine manifestations that derive from the first principle and share to a degree in its life. In Plotinus' crisp language: "The one is all things and not a single one of them."

Although Plotinus does separate the One from all things derived from it, so that, as Kenney puts it, "the central insight of monotheism is secured," nevertheless the separation is not clean. A subtle ontological link remains. Further, the One is not, as in the biblical tradition, an active agent. Hence the importance of contemplation as the instrument by which the self, recognizing its place in the eternal order, achieves "cognitive disclosure" and insight. The One, however, remains serenely passive, always present to the soul but neither taking notice of its striving nor lending its aid.

In Kenney's view, Plotinus was the first to give a coherent account of ancient pagan monotheism. This is no small achievement when one considers the history of ancient philosophical thinking about God. Plotinus thus represents a unique understanding of the monotheism that grew in the soil of the Mediterranean world, with its distinctive religious sensibility, vocabulary, and intellectual framework. When Plotinus speaks about religious experience, it is mediated through a particular language and conceptual system. Platonism is as much an interpretive language as Christianity is.

LANGUAGE, THEN, IS at the heart of the argument of this book. When Kenney turns to Augustine, he introduces the reader to a quite different vocabulary from that employed by Plotinus. He acknowledges, of course, that by reading the Platonic books Augustine was able to think his way out of the crude materialism he learned from the Manichees and to conceive of God as a transcendent spiritual reality.

But if one turns to the famous "ascent" passage in book seven of the *Confessions*, it is Romans 1:20—"his invisible nature has been perceived through the things which are made"—that dominates (it is cited twice) the description of his experience. What hinders Augustine from knowing divine truth is not embodiment but the inner disposition of the soul. It is the "darkness of my soul" that stood in the way of closer contact with God. I was "puffed up with knowledge" says Augustine, again citing St. Paul (1 Cor. 8:1). And then, after more biblical citations, he says that none of these things is found in the Platonic books, not "tears of confession, your sacrifice, a troubled spirit, a contrite and humble spirit, the sal-

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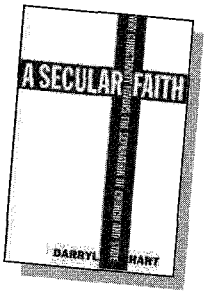

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vation of your people, the espoused city, the guarantee of your Holy Spirit, the cup of our redemption." There one does not sing, "Surely my soul will be submissive to God. From him is my salvation."

Although Augustine acknowledges his debt to Platonism and shows the congruence of Platonism and Christianity on certain points, when he comes to speak of his "conversion" he does so in Christian language. Augustine says yes to Platonic transcendentalism, but he does not see it as a religious option, nor does he interpret his own life in Platonic terms. The *Confessions* gives us not a Platonism baptized but an alternative theology. It is, in short, a work of apologetics.

And the apology has to do not only with religious ideas but also with the practices of a concrete community. Kenney shows that the *Confessions* displays a self-conscious ecclesiology, that Christian contemplation is rooted in the Church's Scriptures and life. Which leads him to the neglected final books of the *Confessions*, which seem to have little to do with the Platonism of the central books. By the time Kenney has finished his analysis, the ascension passages in the middle of the book seem less the fulcrum of the *Confessions* than one piece in a much fuller argument whose meaning is discovered only at the end. In the latter books, the "vocabulary of audition" anchors contemplation more explicitly in the Scriptures. "I listened, Lord, my God; I sucked a drop of sweetness from your truth." The delights of contemplation can be achieved, says Augustine, by adhering to the "solid firmament of your Scripture," for there God holds conversation with us.

In book thirteen, the final book, the Church, "your spiritual people," is the vehicle and context for Christian contemplation. But it is Augustine's treatment of Monica that seals the argument. She is, writes Kenney, "an unpromising candidate for high contemplation in the Plotinian style." The famous vision at Ostia was not that of the solitary seeker—it was an experience shared by Augustine and Monica. And the reason Monica was capable of intense and total concentration was that she had made continual confession of her faults and of her Savior. Her contemplation, writes Kenney, "is an ecclesial moment" that "emerged in the schoolhouse of souls that is the Church."

FINALLY, TO BRING the argument back to where it began, Kenney notes that Augustine ends his book with a discussion of creation. This is most un-Plotinian. For Augustine, the fault line of reality is drawn at a quite different place than for Plotinus. Creatures are brought into being by an act of divine will and always will remain distinct from the one who created them, whereas in Plotinus the intelligible world comes about by a process of self-manifestation. For Augustine, the sharp divide between creator and creature can never be bridged, and Christian contemplation takes the form of confession and praise, not assimilation.

The Mysticism of Saint Augustine is, as the subtitle suggests, a rereading of the *Confessions*. By "rereading," Kenney means a reinterpretation of this ancient and enduring Christian classic. Yet, as should be apparent from the way he lays out his argument, the book has more than a historical agenda. To be sure, it is a contribution to the understanding of the early Augustine that offers a fresh and, to this reviewer, convincing interpretation of a set of issues that has shaped Augustine scholarship in the latter half of the twentieth century.

But Kenney has another agenda. In the preface, he cites Philip Larkin's poem "Aubade": *Religion . . . / That vast moth-eaten musical brocade / Created to pretend we never die.* Larkin's world seems a long way from Augustine, but Kenney knows how hard it is to shed the common

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sentiments of our age when reading the *Confessions*. If it is read through a "culturally established prism," the temptation is to focus on the experience itself, not the reality to which it points, emptying the narrative of its cognitive claims. But when Augustine speaks of transcendence, it is not to describe his subjective feelings or chronicle his elation but to reveal what he has come to know of the living God. His aim was not to achieve ecstasy but to describe his encounter with the truth. This fine book gives us an Augustine who is not captive to the vapid spirituality of our age.

Briefly Noted

Jacques and Raissa Maritain
by Jean-Luc Barré
Notre Dame University Press,
528 pages, $50

First published ten years ago, this was the first true biography of Jacques Maritain, and it has had no rivals since. There have been memoirs, there have been monographs, there have been studies galore of this or that aspect of his thought, but the man himself has had to be sought in his wife Raïssa's lovely wartime memoirs, *We Have Been Friends Together* and *Adventures in Grace*. These remain beautifully evocative and over the years have added posthumous friends to those Raïssa wrote of so movingly. It is rare for a wife to treat her husband so reverently, and it was mutual. Early in their soon-to-be-white marriage, Jacques planned to write a life of Raïssa. After her death, he published her diary. As university students, they had accepted the maxim that there is only one tragedy: not to be a saint. Each clearly thought the other had made the mark. Raïssa was the daughter of Russian Jews who had moved to France. Jacques was the grandson of an eminent politician, and when his mother divorced his father, who would commit suicide, she resumed her maiden name. He was raised more or less as a Protestant, but by the time he was at the Sorbonne, he, like Raïssa, had lost any faith he had. The story of their conversion to Catholicism has become legend. What marked their lives was the conviction that the intellectual life and the spiritual life must go hand in hand. Did their political radicalism die with their conversion? Barré provides a good account of Jacques' long association with Action Française but more or less accepts Raïssa's claim that the association was due to spiritual advisers. The Church's condemnation of Action Française effected a 180-degree turn in Jacques' politics, while the Spanish Civil War strengthened his leftward move and dismayed many Catholics. In *Integral Humanism*, he argued for a new Christianity, which angered and dismayed many more. But when, late in life, he wrote *The Peasant of the Garonne*, he was thought to have taken yet another 180-degree turn. Barré wisely situates these political vagaries, if that is what they were, in the deeper soil of Maritain's intellectual and spiritual life. Maritain became one of the leaders of the Thomistic revival, and the range of his philosophical writings can only amaze—logic, philosophy of science, moral and political philosophy, metaphysics, aesthetics, philosophy of history; he seemed to leave nothing untouched, and he brought to whatever he wrote a profundity and even daring that excited generations of readers. It is surprising that this gentle, thoughtful philosopher stirred up controversy again and again. In his twilight years, he wrote only theology. The vagaries of intellectual reputation are one of the mysteries of life. Who would have predicted that, all these years after his death, Maritain would continue to be read so widely? There are associations and journals named for him; the

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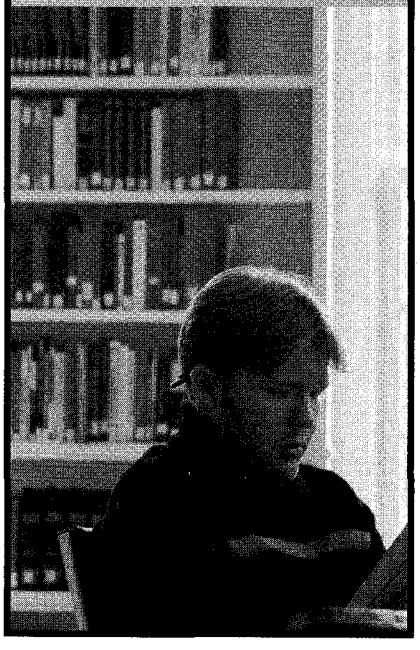

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flood of writings inspired by him has not abated. Most of those who contested his views have disappeared into obscurity. His complete works in French have been published, and there is an English collected works in progress. Barré's biography has given new stimulus to this welcome longevity, and Bernard Doering has put us in his debt with his elegant translation.

—*Ralph McInerny*

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University of Chicago Press,
448 pages, $40

At the end of the fifteenth century, Spain was the only Christian country with large Jewish and Muslim minorities. Andalusia had been ruled by the Muslims, who conquered Spain in the early eighth century. They had created a rich and diverse Arabic culture that included Jews and Christians. It is likely that the first translations of the Qur'an into Latin can be traced to contacts between Christian and Muslim scholars in Spain. But over the centuries, the Catholic kingdoms in the central and northern part of the peninsula had gradually driven back the Muslims in the *Reconquista*. With the conquest of Granada in 1492, the Muslims became subject to Christian rule. The expulsion of the Jews (the estimate is 170,000) by the Catholic rulers is well known, but the parallel story, no less lachrymose, is the deportation (or forced conversion) of thousands of Muslim subjects. In this learned and sensitive book, L.P. Harvey, professor emeritus of Spanish at the University of London and author of an earlier volume, *Islamic Spain, 1250 to 1500*, brings the history of Islamic Spain down to its heartbreaking final chapter. "The final expulsion," writes Harvey, "was a cruel coup de grace to a community long in decline, not a measure of self-defense taken by Christian folk in any real danger of being demographically overwhelmed and outbred." Painful as it is to read, this is a history not to be forgotten.

—*Robert Louis Wilken*

HILLBILLY THOMIST: FLANNERY O'CONNOR, ST. THOMAS AND THE LIMITS OF ART
by MARION MONTGOMERY
McFarland, 2 vols., 706 pages, $65

Flannery O'Connor understood faith as the uncomfortable and the painful cross, and she focused in all her works—even the "pain in her bones"—on living that cross. In *Hillbilly Thomist*, Marion Montgomery contrasts philosophical and literary figures from the "Age of Alienation" to the spiritual advisers of O'Connor, finding that such thinkers as Sartre and Emerson embody society's intellectual and spiritual dislocation, its separation of grace from nature. Because the modern intellectual believes that personal freedom is gained by sin (the ruthless search for personal self-fulfillment without regard to moral principles), while the Christian believes that personal freedom is destroyed by sin, O'Connor must "reveal unexpected spiritual action" through the "totally right and totally unexpected" actions of her characters. Modern man uncovers his own divinity through self-reliance independently of all other causes, by analyzing facts as events standing in their own vacuum, and O'Connor finds such self-sufficiency inadequate: "You do not write the best you can for the sake of art but for the sake of returning your talent increased to the invisible God to use or not use as he sees fit." When she makes her fiction, she draws man "conflicted by good and evil in a world which now assumes itself beyond good and evil." She does not intend to defend Catholicism as one belief among many equals or to speculate whether Catholicism is a relative truth. Instead, O'Connor reveals the "fact of the Word made flesh." Montgomery's massive work contains several chapters on modernism, though his concern with St. Thomas is not specifically outlined. Hence, it is difficult to work through the comparison between O'Connor and St. Thomas. But the aim of *Hillbilly Thomist* is to synthesize O'Connor's writing with St. Thomas' view on rational man's participation in eternal Reason. Montgomery finds that O'Connor's use of her materials (unique though they were, given her Southern Catholic placement in time and space) reveals something distinctly Thomistic.

—*Maria Andraca Carano*

THE MIND OF THE MASTER CLASS: HISTORY AND FAITH IN THE SOUTHERN SLAVEHOLDERS' WORLDVIEW
by ELIZABETH FOX-GENOVESE and EUGENE GENOVESE
Cambridge University Press,
828 pages, $31.99

In his second inaugural address, Abraham Lincoln famously remarked that Northerners and Southerners "read the same Bible, and pray to the same God." In this volume, consisting largely of previously published articles and book chapters, Elizabeth Fox-Genovese and Eugene Genovese suggest the need to qualify that assertion. As the nineteenth century progressed, they argue, Southerners and Northerners developed different, almost antithetical, understandings of Christianity. They read the same Bible but they read it differently, and even the God they prayed to was not quite the same: He remained firmly trinitarian in the South, while sliding toward Unitarian in the more liberal precincts of the North. Southern Protestant theologians denounced their Northern brethren for leaving the Roman Catholic Church as the sole defender of orthodoxy in the region. Behind it

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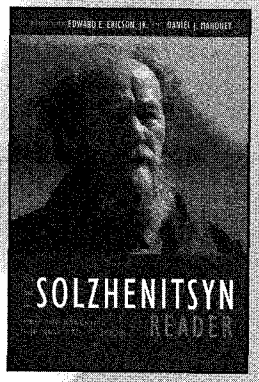

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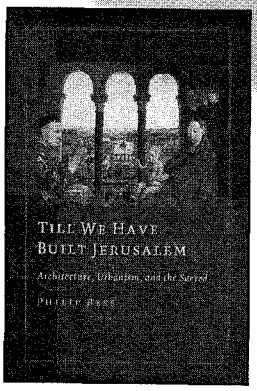

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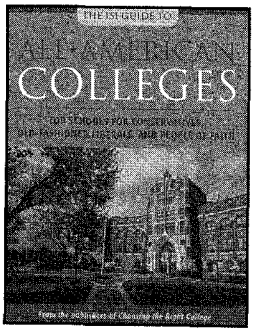

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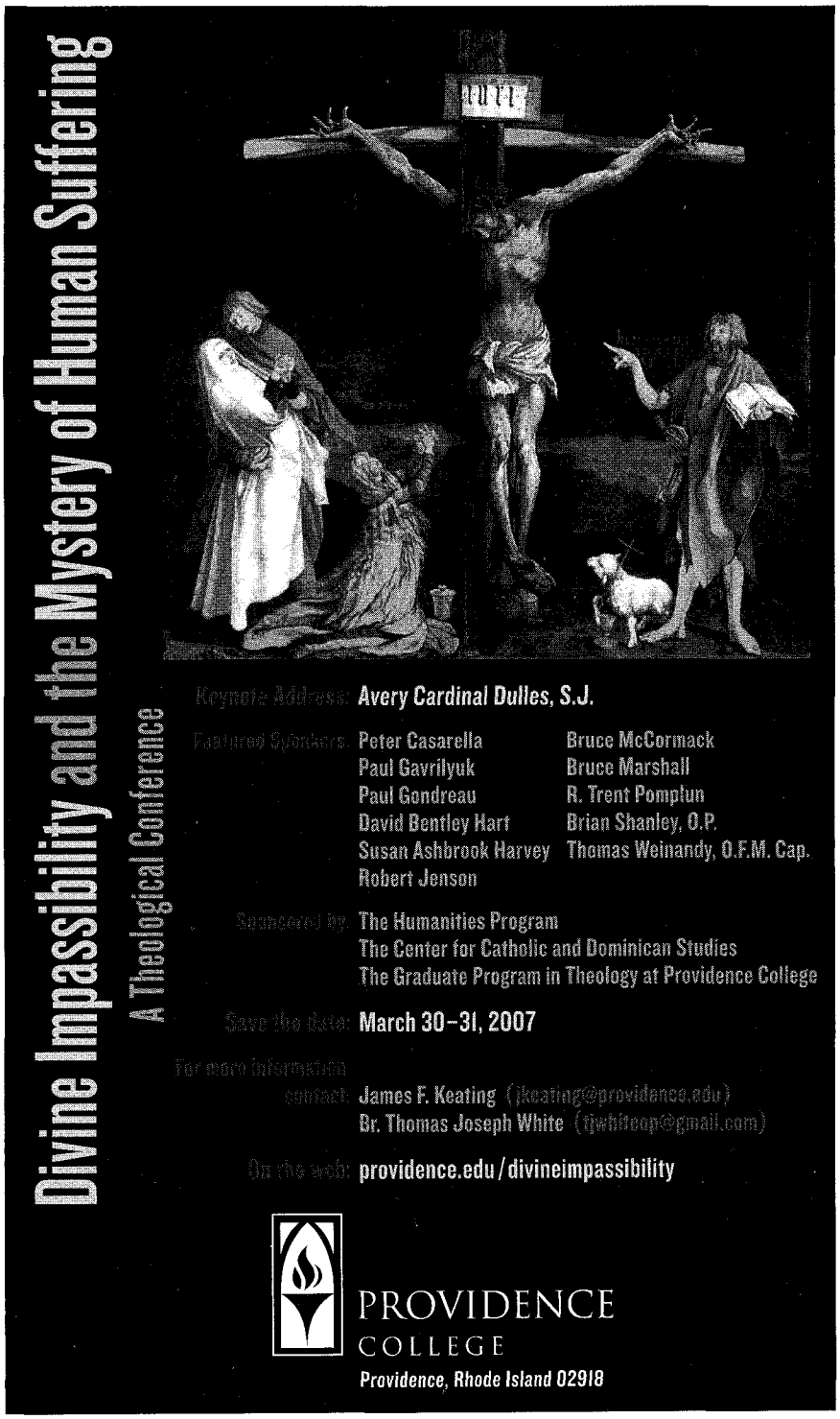
all, the Genoveses claim, was slavery. "The American South ranks with ancient Greece and Rome among the few genuine slave societies in world history," and it deeply influenced the South's social structure, economy, and culture. Southern defenders of slavery, who increased not only in numbers but in the extravagance of their claims in the 1840s and 1850s, availed themselves of whatever devices they could find to defend their "peculiar institution." One was a literal reading of the Bible. They challenged the abolitionists to find any place in the Bible where slavery is condemned, and they bolstered their challenge by citing passages where it seems to be sanctioned. Indeed, the authors claim, within that hermeneutical box, the leading abolitionists were hard put to counter the Southerners' arguments. Most of the abolitionists—John Brown being the most prominent exception—eventually adopted a latitudinarian reading of Scripture, emphasizing the spirit while glossing over the word; some even boldly declared that if the Bible sanctioned slavery they wanted no more to do with it. But the religious differences between the two regions turned on more than divergent readings of Scripture. The authors paint a larger picture of different approaches to such meta-religious topics as historical change, social morality, and the legitimacy of government. There was a streak of radicalism in the South—secessionism was itself a radical act—but Southern religious leaders generally inclined toward organic models of social change, the ideal being a gradual civilizing process emanating from traditions of civility and gentility. *Chivalry* was a term frequently heard in the South. Derived from a romanticized Middle Ages in the novels of Sir Walter Scott and others, it folded into the Christian paternalism that was used to justify slavery. As one minister-professor put it, our Negroes, "in common with minors, imbeciles, and uncivilized persons, have a right to be governed and protected." Another minister used the Aristotelian categories of "commutative justice" (fair exchange of monetary values) and "distributive justice" (allotment of happiness according to rule) to make the same point: Unlike the North, which recognizes only the former, we Southerners provide for the happiness of our slaves long after their monetary value has ended. The authors are quick to note the flimsiness of this argument but insist that its effect was to soften some of the hardest edges of slavery. Many Southern ministers regarded the war as the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supreme test: Either slavery was brought up to "Abrahamic standards" or God would send the heathens to punish the South, as he had done to the Israelites. The book retains the scholarly texture and intensity of the journal articles that largely compose it. As such, it is sometimes fatiguingly overdocumented, piling up example after example to make its points; some of those examples would have been better consigned to endnotes. But this flaw, which some patient readers may not even consider a flaw, is slight when compared with the book's virtues; chief among them is the authors' sympathetic but not uncritical ear to the voices of the South as it drifted toward catastrophe.

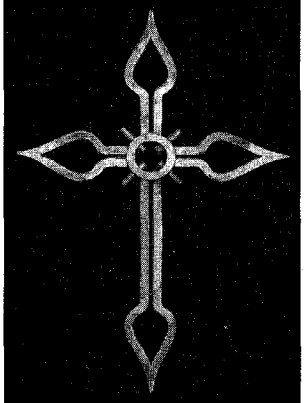
—George McKenna

The Meaning of Marriage: Family, State, Market & Morals
edited by Robert P. George and Jean Bethke Elshtain
Spence, 316 pages, $29.95

Who creates the meaning of marriage? If we are to understand and uphold the dignity of this institution, the shouting over same-sex marriage, Jean Bethke Elshtain notes, needs to and must be changed to a serious, thoughtful public debate. A bold and articulate compendium of essays, *The Meaning of Marriage* strives to advance the case for traditional marriage. The contributing writers—scholars and experts in the fields of philosophy, economics, history, law, public policy, political and social science—presented this research at a Princeton conference sponsored by the Witherspoon Institute. Essayist Roger Scruton observes that the "distinct social aura" that once enveloped marriage is diminishing. Traditional monogamous heterosexual marriage is under siege, as numerous authors note, by an increase in a variety of factors: state power, a secular and legal worldview, a culture of entitlement, and adult-centered gratification. The time-honored understanding of marriage as unitive, procreative, indissoluble, and based on sexual complementarity is in jeopardy. As Scruton suggests in his essay, "Sacrilege and Sacrament," the welfare state does not "love," yet it has its hands all over marriage, attempting to redefine and reshape it. In an outstanding analysis, "Soft Despotism and Same-Sex Marriage," Seana Sugrue exposes the ways in which a top-down view of marriage forces families to rely on state dependence instead of self-governance for survival. When the principle of subsidiarity breaks down, children are the ones to suffer social experiments and "commodification." After all, same-sex marriage cannot naturally result in children; the state must take an active role in constructing those families. According to Sugrue, this increase in state power over marriage also serves to stigmatize religions whose centuries-old values are at odds with newfound state laws. Several essays focus on the ways marriage is being broken. Don Browning and Elizabeth Marquardt reflect on how modernization has given rise to "multiple separations" of the goods of marriage: committed love from sex, sex from childbirth, and childbirth from parenting. It is this "adultocentric" view that threatens children's well-being. Where marriage has become a matter of "consumer satisfaction," as Harold James remarks, the "extraordinary institution" David F. Forte describes loses its virtues of selflessness and sacrifice. As the demand for abortion rights, privacy rights, and contraception discussed by Hadley Arkes, Katherine Shaw Spaht, and W. Bradford Wilcox increase, what will happen to what Robert P. George calls the "intrinsic good" of marriage? Jennifer Roback Morse and other authors point out that marriage cannot operate under a market system. This critique of a libertarian approach to marriage is compelling. Marriage is *both* an intimate and a public union, and it is more than a "bundle of benefits." It involves raising and caring for a new generation of children. The value of two biological parents raising their children is emphasized in social science evidence presented by Maggie Gallagher. *The Meaning of Marriage* is a provocative and essential voice of reason in the marriage debate.

—Erin M. Palazzolo

Christian Legal Thought



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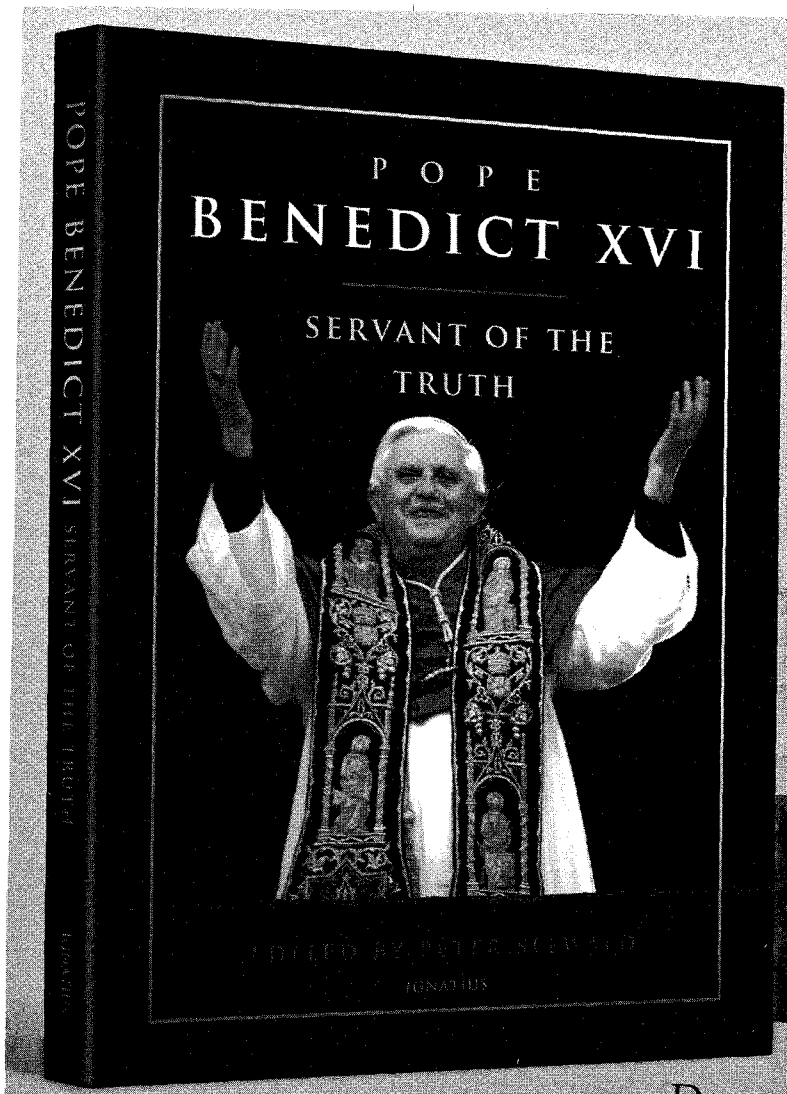

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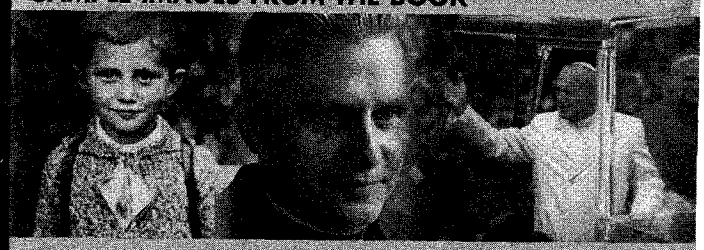

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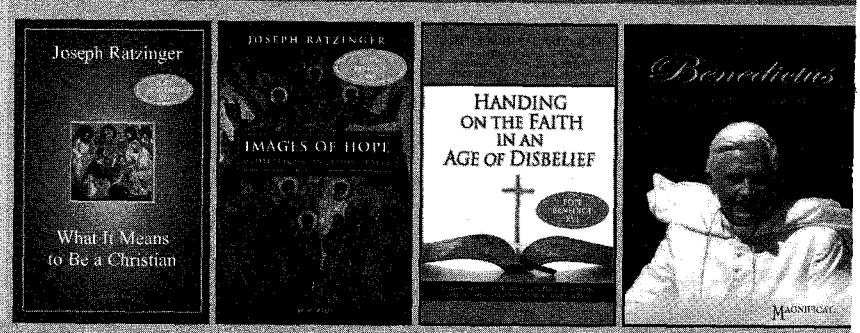
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The Regensburg Moment

It is by no means certain, but it is more than just possible, that Pope Benedict's September 12 lecture at the University of Regensburg and the controversy surrounding it will be referred to, five or twenty years from now, as "The Regensburg Moment."

As many commentators, Muslim and other, do not know because they manifestly did not read the lecture, it was not chiefly about Islam. It was a considered reflection on the inseparable linkage of faith and reason in the Christian understanding, an incisive critique of Christian thinkers who press for separating faith and reason in the name of "de-Hellenizing" Christianity, and a stirring call for Christians to celebrate the achievements of modernity and secure those achievements by grounding them in a more comprehensive and coherent understanding of human rationality.

Benedict was widely criticized for being impolitic, even recklessly provocative, in citing a fourteenth-century colloquy between a Byzantine emperor and a Muslim intellectual in which the emperor drew some distinctly uncomplimentary conclusions about Islam. Perhaps the pope should have chosen a less "brusque" (his characterization of the emperor's statement) example from history, but his obvious point was to show that the problem he was addressing is not new. Violence has no place in the advancing of religion. To act against reason is to act against the nature of God. That is Benedict's argument.

Numerous commentators suggested a sharp contrast between Benedict and John Paul II in their attitudes toward Islam. Somewhat amusingly, pundits who had for years deplored John Paul's "rigid" and "authoritarian" pontificate now spoke nostalgically about his wonderfully open and dialogical ways. As usual, any stick will do in beating up on whoever is currently the pope. As a matter of fact, however, there is no substantive difference between the two popes and their understanding of Islam.

In his 1994 worldwide bestseller, *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*, John Paul expressed respect for "the religiosity of the Muslims" and their "fidelity to prayer." "The image of believers in Allah who, without caring about time or place, fall to their knees and immerse themselves in prayer remains a model for all those who invoke the true God, in particular for those Christians who, having deserted their magnificent cathedrals, pray only a little or not at all." That having been said, John Paul continues:

> Whoever knows the Old and New Testaments, and then reads the Koran, clearly sees the process by which it completely reduces Divine Revelation. It is impossible not to note the movement away from what God said about himself, first in the Old Testament through the Prophets, and then finally in the New Testament through His Son. In Islam, all the richness of God's self-revelation, which constitutes the heritage of the Old and New Testaments, has definitely been set aside.
>
> Some of the most beautiful names in the human language are given to the God of the Koran, but He is ultimately a God outside of the world, a God who is only Majesty, never Emmanuel, God with us. Islam is not a religion of redemption. There is no room for the Cross and the Resurrection. Jesus is mentioned, but only as a prophet who prepares for the last prophet, Muhammad. There is also mention of Mary, His

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> Virgin Mother, but the tragedy of redemption is completely absent. For this reason not only the theology but also the anthropology of Islam is very distant from Christianity.

So the hard questions about Islam raised by Benedict at Regensburg (and elsewhere) are hardly new in papal thought. Benedict has expressed regret about the violent Muslim reaction to what he said; he has continued to meet with Muslim leaders; he has reaffirmed the Church's continuing dialogue with Islam—but there is no chance whatsoever that he will retract or retreat from the argument he has made. And there is no doubt that he will continue to insist on greater "reciprocity" in relation to Islam. The Muslims' religious freedom in the West should be joined to religious freedom for Christians and others in Islamic countries. Benedict very thoroughly aired this question with the Curia in Rome and with the cardinals during the past year, and there is solid agreement that reciprocity must be a central theme in Catholic-Muslim relations in the future.

But as I said, Regensburg was addressed chiefly to intellectuals in the West, and especially to theologians and philosophers: to theologians who try to pit authentically biblical Christianity against the Greek intellectual inheritance, thus abandoning the great achievement of the Church's synthesis of faith and reason; and to philosophers, Christian and non-Christian, who have accepted a modern understanding of reason that reduces it to what counts as "science," with the same result of sundering faith and reason.

A Kantian divorce of reason from religion and morality leaves the intellectual defenders of the West incapable of explaining why, for instance, one should rationally prefer a religion of reasonable persuasion to a religion of violence. There are utilitarian reasons, of course. But who is to say which religion is the more true? If all religion and morality is in the realm of the nonrational or even the irrational and is purely subjective, truth has nothing to do with it. Benedict contrasts this with the great tradition of Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle. They were intensely concerned with the reasonable exploration of the great questions that Enlightenment rationality dismisses as religious and no part of reasonable discourse.

At Regensburg and elsewhere, Benedict has carefully made the case that modern rationality is itself dependent upon, and inexplicable apart from, the understanding of reason and the rationality of the world produced by Christianity's appropriation and development of the Hellenic philosophical tradition. This truth is well understood by Lee Harris, author of *Civilization and Its Enemies* and *The Suicide of Reason*. Harris is no particular friend of Christianity, but he understands the boldness and crucial importance of the challenge Benedict is raising to intellectuals of the West. Writing in the *Weekly Standard*, he says:

> In his moving and heroic speech, Joseph Ratzinger has chosen to play the part of Socrates, not giving us dogmatic answers, but stinging us with provocative questions. Shall we abandon the lofty and noble conception of reason for which Socrates gave his life? Shall we delude ourselves into thinking that the life of reason can survive without courage and character? Shall we be content with lives we refuse to examine, because such examination requires us to ask questions for which science can give no definite answer? The destiny of reason will be determined by how we in the modern West answer these questions.

Benedict knows that Christian history has had its own experience with the sundering of faith and reason. At Regensburg, he cited the influence of John Duns Scotus (1266–1308) and some of the Protestant Reformers who proposed a Christianity liberated from the philosophical thought that they viewed as alien to Christian faith. In the case of Scotus and others, this leads, he said, "to the image of a capricious God, who is not even bound to truth and goodness. God's transcendence and otherness are so exalted that our reason, our sense of the true and good, are no longer an authentic mirror of God, whose deepest possibilities remain eternally unattainable and hidden behind his actual decisions."

Two Wings

This is the intellectual history that leads to modernity's view of a clash between faith and reason. Reason is the light of the known and faith is a "blind leap" into the unknown. Very different is the understanding set forth by John Paul II in the encyclical *Fides et Ratio*: "Faith and reason are like two wings on which the human spirit rises to the contemplation of truth; and God has placed in the human heart a desire to know the truth—in a word, to know himself—so that, by knowing and loving God, men and women may also come to the fullness of truth about themselves."

At Regensburg, Benedict underscored that a view of the nature of God as capricious and voluntaristic is fundamentally incompatible with the teaching of the Church. "The faith of the Church has always insisted that between God and us, between his eternal Creator Spirit and our created reason, there exists a real analogy, in which—as the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215 stated—unlikeness remains infinitely greater than likeness, yet not to the point of abolishing analogy and its language. God does not become more divine when we push him away from us in a sheer, impenetrable volun-

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tarism; rather, the truly divine God is the God who has revealed himself as *logos* and, as *logos*, has acted and continues to act lovingly on our behalf." God and man are not in competition, or should not be. God is divine reason and love, and man is a creature, but also a participant in the mind of God and in the intelligent response of love.

In the world of the news cycles that consume and spit out "what is happening now" with expert rapidity, Regensburg is a long time ago. But for those who attend to the rational and moral defense of the West, not least in relation to Islam, what was said in that lecture hall and the responses to it will be pondered and debated long into the future. At the height of the violent reactions by Muslims, the dominant note in the Western media—led, predictably, by the *New York Times*—was that Benedict had been careless or unnecessarily provocative and should, figuratively speaking, crawl on his knees to Mecca to ask forgiveness. Figuratively speaking, of course, because they don't allow infidels at Mecca.

In the Vatican and in the Catholic journalistic world, there were voices that joined in the tut-tutting of an uncouth and unlearned pope who had disrupted the dialogue with a "religion of peace." The nitpicking pedantry of some Catholic experts on Islam was given prominent display in the world's press. But, from Catholic and other Christian leaders, along with Jews and some secular intellectuals, there was also an outpouring of support for what the pope had the wisdom and courage to say. They recognized that momentous issues of long-term consequence had at last been joined in a way that made possible and imperative continuing debate.

Regrettably, the official response of the Catholic bishops conference in this country, issued by Bishop William Skylstad, the conference president, was not helpful. The tone was condescending and patronizing, almost apologizing for the pope's inept disturbance of our wonderfully dialogical relationship with our Muslim brothers and sisters. We are assured that, despite his unfortunate statements, he really does want peaceful dialogue. I paraphrase, of course, but the statement was anything but a firm defense of the pope, never mind an effort to explain what he actually said. It might have been written by a public relations firm engaged in damage control, and possibly was.

But for many others, the words spoken on September 12, 2006, and the responses, both violent and reasonable, to those words may, five or twenty years from now, be referred to as "The Regensburg Moment," meaning a moment of truth. As I say, it is by no means certain, but it is more than just possible.

The Empire of Blasted Dreams

Every once in a while, we receive an exceedingly rude reminder why economics is called the dismal science. One reason being, of course, that it fancies itself a science. Raising embarrassing questions at a party celebrating the widely professed concern for the poor of the world is economist William Easterly in *The White Man's Burden: Why the West's Efforts to Aid the Rest Have Done So Much Ill and So Little Good* (Penguin). Four hundred pages of statistics, charts, graphs, and depressing history, all sprinkled with mostly grim anecdotes, elaborate on the subtitle.

There is no doubt that Easterly cares about the poor, who are mainly in the global South. He has spent decades of his life working with the major development organizations and is now professor of economics at New York University and a senior fellow of the Center for Global Development. He previously wrote *The Elusive Quest for Growth*, which has become a standard reference in development circles. He cares, but he is convinced that most of the money spent on foreign aid (in the trillions in the past half century) has done very little good and a great deal of damage. He is utterly scornful of the utopian proposals to end world poverty that issue with wearied regularity from politicians, rock stars, and international bureaucracies.

Whether the source be Tony Blair, or Bono, or the World Bank, the massive failures of the past are regularly dusted off and, without even changing the language, presented as new, visionary, and requiring only tens of billions in additional funding to end poverty at last. Easterly's tone is more regretful and even whimsical than angry, although the anger breaks through from time to time. The White Man's Burden, in which the West is going to solve the problems of the Rest, has produced a huge world of interlocking and frequently self-serving bureaucracies that have only a tenuous relationship to helping poor people.

There is the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, the Millennium Development Goals, the United Nations Development Program, the African Development Bank, the United Nations Conference and Trade and Development, the World Health Organization, the United Nations Children's Fund, and, of course, the World Trade Organization. Then follow a host of subsidiary bureaucracies, including those of individual rich countries and the European Union.

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Easterly tells a grim story of the selling of delusions, of catastrophes, cover-ups, and corruption resulting in the bolstering of despotic regimes. The fair-minded reader who is concerned about the poor may well conclude that foreign aid, with all its pomps, pretensions, and ensconced apparatchiks, is a cruel shell game played at the expense of the poor and should be terminated.

That is apparently not Mr. Easterly's intention, however. He is still very much in the development business. He offers proposals for reform. He writes at length on how current approaches favor "Planners" over "Searchers." Planners sit at desks and conference with one another endlessly in Washington and Brussels, working up grand schemes to be announced with much fanfare at international meetings of the rich before imposing the same old thing they've been imposing for decades on poor countries, whether the schemes help the poor or not.

Searchers, by way of contrast, are attentive to what is happening on the ground, encouraging of local initiatives, and determined to hold programs accountable to the bottom line of whether the poor become less poor. Who could possibly disagree with the call for such accountability? The problem is that, by Easterly's own account, the usual grand designs cooked up by bureaucrats routinely rail against bureaucracy and demand level upon level of accountability. Every grand new global initiative that has been launched in the past decades has been described as a radical break from business as usual as it demands more billions for the funding of business as usual.

A Conceptual Poverty

Easterly concludes with this: "Even if you don't work in the field of helping the poor, you can still, as a citizen, let your voice be heard for the cause of aid delivering the goods to the poor. You citizens don't have to settle for the grandiose but empty plans to make poverty history. All of you can make known your dissatisfaction with Planners and call for more Searchers." Great. Write your representative or senator saying that you want those billions of dollars to really help poor people. That will shake them up at the World Bank and send tremors through the structure of sinecured paper pushers at the UN Development Fund.

I don't doubt that Easterly is mostly right about the development establishments being as ineffective, and frequently counterproductive, as he claims they are. He knows the numbers and documents the glaring gap between expenditure and results. The picture he offers is devastating.

One is struck, however, by the conceptual poverty of his critique. He has a commonsensical appreciation of the need for market dynamics, and the distinction between Planners and Searchers is no doubt right. One may hope that—against the entrenched habits and ethos of the development establishment—more Planners will listen to, or even become, Searchers. But Easterly's analysis is severely limited to the economic ideas and vocabulary of the development world of which he has so long been part.

In a word, Easterly's understanding of poverty and what can be done about it is strikingly statist. Despite all the talk about being attentive to what is happening to people on the ground, the story he tells is overwhelmingly the story of governments and government policies; of rich governments bearing the White Man's Burden and poor governments suffering from, or colluding in, the moral imperialism of the delusions of the rich. There is barely a passing mention of thousands of nongovernmental programs, mainly church-related, that are demonstrably effective in countering disease, feeding the hungry, and advancing development by building communities of mutual aid. Culture and religion hardly get a cameo appearance in his account.

Conceptually, the distinction between Planners and Searchers is obvious enough, but there is nothing of the nuance and detail in describing the dynamics of freedom and development explored in, for instance, John Paul II's 1991 encyclical, *Centesimus Annus,* on "expanding the circle of productivity and exchange." It appears that Mr. Easterly has read and thought very little outside the box of the statist development establishment he so sharply criticizes.

For the sake of the poor of the world, and of our own humanity, we cannot resign ourselves to a third of the world's population living in abject poverty. We know that most of the big statist solutions are, although often well-intended, a destructive delusion. Aspects of that story, with specific reference to humanitarian interventions in regional conflicts, are very compellingly told by David Rieff in his 2002 book, *A Bed for the Night: Humanitarianism in Crisis.* We may be on the edge of a widespread turn against programmatic efforts to help the poor—not because people don't care, but because they become convinced that caring doesn't make much difference and often seems to make matters worse.

The White Man's Burden provides much useful information about failures relative to economic development. If Mr. Easterly had let his imagination range beyond governments and government policies, he might have left his readers with a hope and sense of responsibility that goes beyond writing a letter to Congress demanding that, in exchange for the next $10 billion, programs of massive ineffectiveness be made effective.

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White Guilt, Black Rage

In *The Content of Our Character*, Shelby Steele of Stanford University took on the stereotypes that continue to bedevil race relations in America. The book deservedly received a great deal of attention, much of it very critical. Now Steele is back again with *White Guilt: How Blacks and Whites Together Destroyed the Promise of the Civil Rights Movement* (HarperCollins). You are right if you think he is being more than a bit provocative.

The book opens with the observation that President Eisenhower was rumored to have used the N-word from time to time. Steele compares that with President Clinton's marital infidelities.

> President Clinton survived what would certainly have destroyed President Eisenhower, and Eisenhower could easily have survived what would almost certainly have destroyed Clinton. Each man, finally, was no more than indiscreet within the moral landscape of his era. Neither racism in the fifties nor womanizing in the nineties was a profound enough sin to undermine completely the moral authority of the president. So it was the good luck of each president to sin into the moral relativism of his era rather than into its puritanism. And, interestingly, the moral relativism of one era was the puritanism of the other. Race simply replaced sex as the primary focus of America's moral seriousness.

Steele describes colorfully (if one may be permitted the term) his own epiphany in discovering his black manhood and power in exploiting white guilt. He recognized that the simple recognition by whites of their race's association with racism created a vacuum of moral authority that opened opportunities for black rage. "Whites (and American institutions) must acknowledge historical racism to show themselves redeemed of it, but once they acknowledge it, they lose moral authority over everything having to do with race, equality, social justice, poverty, and so on. They step into a void of vulnerability. The authority they lose transfers to the 'victims' of historical racism and becomes their great power in society. This is why white guilt is quite literally the same thing as black power."

Personal morality has given way to social rectitude. The use of the N-word is a fatal indication that one does not have the requisite social attitude. Womanizing in the White House is not socially approved, but it is, after all, only a personal peccadillo. This, says Steele, is the "global racism" that has radically skewed our moral sensibilities and judgments. Racism is worse than murder. In the O.J. Simpson trial, he notes, the question of whether Detective Mark Fuhrman had ever used the N-word trumped the DNA evidence linking Simpson to the murderers. "And the court itself—like most American institutions in this age of white guilt—was so bereft of moral authority in racial matters that it could not restore proportionality to the proceedings.... Racism was allowed to become a kind of contaminating ether that wafted through and dispelled even the hardest evidence."

Every institution is in flight from being stigmatized as racist. Steele notes that Texaco paid out $750 million to the "corrupt diversity industry," even though a "racist" executive did nothing more than to repeat a nonracist term that he picked up, ironically enough, in a company-sponsored program on diversity training. Toyota has paid more than $7 billion, and other companies have paid hundreds of millions, to avoid being stigmatized as racist. Steele does not mention that Jesse Jackson each year holds a shakedown festival on Wall Street at which he extorts huge amounts of money in return for not publicly labeling corporations as racist. "The race card works," writes Steele, "by the mechanism of global racism: even a hint of racism proves the rule of systemic racism. So these corporations never pay to the measure of any actual racism; they pay to the measure of racism's hyped-up and bloated reputation in the age of white guilt."

Thomas and Dowd

Steele is particularly exercised by the Supreme Court decision in which Sandra Day O'Connor wrote that the victims of white racism would require another twenty-five years of affirmative action in order to compete on an equal basis. Justice Clarence Thomas wrote a withering dissent in which he protested that he and others were not to be condescendingly treated as black victims but as individuals possessed of the dignity of being responsible for their successes and failures. Thomas' dissent outraged Maureen Dowd of the *New York Times*, who made much of the claim that Thomas himself had benefited by affirmative action. Here is Steele at his most caustic:

> Maureen Dowd, thinking herself quite incapable of racism, effectively calls Justice Thomas a nigger who—given his fundamental inferiority—should show "gratitude" to his white betters. In her rage, this ever so hip baby boomer liberal invokes white supremacy itself to annihilate Thomas—in reaction to her sense of being annihilated by him. So mired in white blindness, so lost in the liberal orthodoxy that counts mere dissociation from

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racism as virtue, and so addicted to the easy moral esteem that comes to her from dissociation, Dowd plays the oldest race cards of all—I'm white and you're black, so shut up and be grateful for my magnanimity. It is as though in fighting for her human visibility she is really fighting for her superiority—a superiority that Thomas annihilated and that she now wants back.

Central to Shelby Steele's argument is that the age of racism is past. The civil rights movement under the leadership of Martin Luther King Jr. was a great success. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 signaled triumph over a great national evil. Instead of celebrating the achievement, however, the age of racism was almost immediately replaced by the age of white guilt. The identities shaped around black victimhood, black rage, and black power are inexplicable apart from the regime of white guilt. The proponents of affirmative action and other policies supporting the guilt regime care little about real black people, especially those in the black urban underclass. Like Maureen Dowd and Sandra Day O'Connor and Texaco, their interest is in maintaining their position of superiority, including presumed moral superiority, by paying their tithe to be certified as innocent of the guilt borne by an allegedly racist society.

This is heady stuff. There is much to argue with in Steele's thesis. My copy of the book is littered with question marks in the margins. But Steele makes a convincing case that our society is much more marked by white guilt than by white racism, and that the institutionalizing of white guilt is in the service, however inadvertently, of supporting whatever remains of white racism. To those who are open to exploring a radically different way of understanding racism in America, I recommend *White Guilt: How Blacks and Whites Together Destroyed the Promise of the Civil Rights Movement.*

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Bonhoeffer Today

The Nazi doctrine of *Lebensunwertes Leben* (life that is not worthy of life) had the widest possible applications, from euthanasia to the elimination of the handicapped to the mass killings at Auschwitz. While the Third Reich opposed the abortion of the "genetically superior," Pastor Dietrich Bonhoeffer understood that the logic of abortion was integral to a regime that presumed to exercise total power over life and death. Bonhoeffer, who was executed by the regime in April of 1945, spoke of four divine "mandates" in the ordering of human life: family, labor, government, and Church. The following passage from his *Ethics* occurs in a discussion of the family:

Marriage involves acknowledgment of the right of life that is to come into being, a right which is not subject to the disposal of the married couple. Unless this right is acknowledged as a matter of principle, marriage ceases to be marriage and becomes a mere liaison. Acknowledgment of this right means making way for the free creative power of God which can cause new life to proceed from this marriage according to His will. Destruction of the embryo in the mother's womb is a violation of the right to live which God has bestowed upon this nascent life. To raise the question whether we are here concerned already with a human being or not is merely to confuse the issue. The simple fact is that God certainly intended to create a human being and that this nascent human being has been deliberately deprived of his life. And that is nothing but murder. A great many different motives may lead to an action of this kind; indeed in cases where it is an act of despair, performed in circumstances of extreme human or economic destitution and misery, the guilt may often lie rather with the community than with the individual. Precisely in this connection money may conceal many a wanton deed, while the poor man's more reluctant lapse may far more easily be disclosed. All these considerations must no doubt have a quite decisive influence on our personal and pastoral attitude towards the person concerned, but they cannot in any way alter the fact of murder.

While We're At It

■ So what is the name of the enemy? A lot of candidates have been proposed and employed in the last five years: Islamic fundamentalism, Islamofascism, Islamic totalitarianism, Islamism, terrorism, or simply extremism. Islamism, as distinguished from Islam, is used by many scholars, but it is a subtlety that will elude most people. Fundamentalism is an American Christian phenomenon with a very specific history that has nothing to do with Islam. Terrorism is a means employed by the enemy, but it does not name the enemy. And extremism is a generalized pejorative naming nothing in particular. References to fascism and totalitarianism have a fine hawkish ring, and there are indeed some parallels between what we faced in Nazism and communism and what confronts us now, but the dissimilarities are much greater, beginning with the role of religion in the new challenge. So what is the name of the enemy? I suggest that the most accurate term is Jihadism. The definition is not difficult to understand: *Jihadism is the religiously inspired ideology that it is the*

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moral obligation of all Muslims to employ whatever means necessary in order to compel the world's submission to Islam. Those who support that ideology are Jihadists, and that is exactly what they say they believe. They describe themselves as Jihadists, and there is no reason why we should impose upon them a name—fascist, fundamentalist, etc.—from our Western and distinctly non-Islamic history. It will be objected that in the Qur'an, *jihad* can also mean peaceful spiritual struggle. That is true, as it is true that those Muslims who believe *jihad* means peaceful spiritual struggle are not the enemy. "Jihadism." Say it five times and it comes easily. It has the additional merit of being accurate. It is good to see that this terminology is gaining some traction in our public discussions.

■ Remember *The Da Vinci Code*? The gospel according to Judas? They and whatever comes next are part of a very old story, Philip Jenkins writes in the thirtieth anniversary issue of that fine journal the *Chesterton Review*. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, there was enormous popular enthusiasm over the "discovery" of new gospels by, inter alia, Thomas, Peter, Mary, and even by Judas Iscariot and Eve. Madame Blavatsky and her Theosophical Society were prominent in debunking the orthodox Christian story that had been imposed by wicked churchmen, and most especially by the Catholic Church. There were also very popular novels along the line of *The Da Vinci Code*. In a way similar to the appeal of Elaine Pagels' promotion of Gnosticism today, feminist themes were prominent. Elizabeth Cady Stanton published *Woman's Bible* in 1895, and Matilda Gage's *Women, Church and State* (1895) launched the mythology of European witches who were the remnant of an ancient matriarchal society that was centered in a fertility cult that had been persecuted into extinction by the patriarchal Church. Jenkins writes: "The new discoveries are never as new or as sensational as they are touted to be. Looking at the writings of the early twentieth century—as of the early 21st—our overwhelming impression is that people earnestly wanted to find some particular message in early Christianity, and wished heartily that this claim could be justified by some authentic scripture. And in the absence of such a genuine text, spurious or flimsy texts were vastly exaggerated—in effect, reinvented to become the weighty scriptures that people hoped to find. To adopt Dr. Johnson's words, the constant emphasis on the unique wisdom and value of the new-old scriptures, all scholarship to the contrary, must be seen as 'the triumph of hope over experience.'" Jenkins observes, "The cyclical nature of claims and 'discoveries' suggests that such amazing 'new gospels' are rather like London buses: There is no need to worry if you miss one because another will be along within ten minutes." Well yes, but why now? Perhaps there is more than we might think to the claims of some scholars that the turn of a century, and especially of a millennium, generates widespread apocalyptic fantasy. I don't know. But there is, as Jenkins suggests, something touching in the desire to certify fantasy by reference to Jesus and early Christianity. It is as though, in their determined rejection of historic Christianity, people can't let go of it. In that, and despite the fabrications and sensationalism, there may be reason for hope.

■ Increasingly encountered in the product of the commentariat is the observation that left and right are engaged in a battle over who has rightful claim to the religious and philosophical legacy of the American Founders. We should not let partisan intellectual contests distract us from more important historical inquiries. In his book *On Two Wings*, Michael Novak very helpfully sets out the structure of Christian thought—a structure, he insists, inseparably connected to Jewish and Old Testament understandings of human nature and history—that provided the conceptual matrix for the understandings and aspirations shaping our constitutional order. In a later book, *Washington's God*, he and Jana Novak insightfully explore the ways in which the faith and worldview of the first president are situated, sometimes uneasily, within that structure of Christian thought. Gordon Wood of Brown University, the distinguished historian of the American founding, has said of this project: "I agree with Michael that it's been the last 100 years, in fact the last half of the 20th century, that our society has become much more secular and as a consequence we've tended to interpret the 18th century in a more secular way. But I think that's just a mistake. That was a very religious world. In fact, ordinary people were far more religious than the leaders. Washington is, among the founders, I think, probably as religious as any of them." The point of books such as *On Two Wings* and *Washington's God* is not to pass judgment on whether the Founders were "true Christians," as true Christianity is variously defined. That judgment has long since been passed by Higher Authority. The point is to understand the national experience of which we are part. The further point is to illumine the ways in which the beliefs of those who crafted this constitutional order are inexplicable without careful attention to the Christian tradition of which they, however variously, were part.

■ Repeatedly and ever more plaintively, the question is asked, "Where is the religious left?" Ever eager to serve, Jim Wallis of *Sojourners* responds, "Here am I, send me

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to repel the threatening armies of the theocrats!" Wallis steadfastly deplores the ways in which the religious right equates its politics with the will of God. To counter such religious arrogance, he wrote a popular book explaining his own politics. He called the book *God's Politics*. It comes complete with the U.S. federal budget that the prophet Isaiah would have written if he had known more about modern economics. Jim Wallis is not alone in trying to revive, or invent, a religious left. The Network of Spiritual Progressives is a project led by Rabbi Michael Lerner of *Tikkun* magazine. *Tikkun* refers to the mending of the world, which all can agree is a good thing to try to do. Recently, he and Sister Joan Chittister, a Benedictine nun, convened a gathering of the Network in Washington, D.C. Neela Banerjee, writing in the *New York Times*, reports: "They had come to All Souls Unitarian Church, 1,200 of them from 39 states, to wrest the mantle of moral authority from conservative Christians, and they were finally planning how to take their message to those in power." Tony Campolo, the liberal Baptist, told the gathering that they should invoke biblical authority. "People in Congress respect the Book, even if they don't know what it says. If we don't recognize this, we don't know squat." A hirsute young man objected: "I thought this was a spiritual progressives' conference. I don't want to play the game of 'the Bible says this or that,' or that we get validation from something other than ourselves. We should be speaking from our hearts." He possibly reads *Tikkun*. When the conferees deployed their forces on Capitol Hill, Carol Gottesman, a 64-year-old nurse from Hubbard, Ohio, engaged her Democrat congressman, Tim Ryan, who said he had heard of the progressive network. Mr. Ryan asked if the group was pressing specific policies. "No," said Ms. Gottesman, "it's more that we want to take caring and generosity and bring it into everything." Mr. Ryan responded, "Spread love, not hate. Pretty simple. Do you have a little network back home?" Banerjee writes, "Ms. Gottesman squared her shoulders proudly and said, 'I'm it.'" Validation from ourselves indeed. In truth, the 1,200 souls at All Souls Unitarian Church were validating one another in their communal affirmation of their very singular selves. There is a religious left. It is defined by a shared reaction to the religious right. It is not about to change its name to the Network of Spiritual Reactionaries, however. These people understand themselves to be progressive, open-minded, inquiring, and fiercely opposed to the moral arrogance of conservatives who claim that their policy preferences are, as Jim Wallis might put it, "God's politics."

■ In Lariano, Italy, there was this meeting sponsored by the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue and the World Council of Churches. The subject was "Conversion—Assessing the Reality." The report from the meeting underscores a number of important truths. Particularly welcome is the ringing affirmation of the right to religious freedom: "Freedom of religion is a fundamental, inviolable and non-negotiable right of every human being in every country in the world. Freedom of religion connotes the freedom, without any obstruction, to practice one's own faith, freedom to propagate the teachings of one's faith to people of one's own and other faiths, and also the freedom to embrace another faith out of one's own free choice." This reflects the Vatican's increasing insistence upon "reciprocity" in relation to Islam. While mosques multiply across the landscape of Europe, Christian Bibles and crosses are confiscated at the borders of many Muslim countries where worship and witness by the "infidels" is prohibited. But then the report from the consultation starts to go wobbly:

> We affirm that while everyone has a right to invite others to an understanding of their faith, it should not be exercised by violating other's [sic] rights and religious sensibilities. At the same time, all should heal themselves from the obsession of converting others.
>
> Freedom of religion enjoins upon all of us the equally non-negotiable responsibility to respect faiths other than our own, and never to denigrate, vilify or misrepresent them for the purpose of affirming superiority of our faith.

What does it mean to violate the "religious sensibilities" of others? Danish cartoons of Muhammad result in riots and the death of dozens of people because, Muslims explain, their religious sensibilities are violated. Churches are torched, the pope is burned in effigy, and Christians are attacked and killed because Regensburg offended Muslim sensibilities. Of course, we must never misrepresent the religion of others, and in proposing the truth we should accent the positive, but the statement of what is true can tend to denigrate (*Webster's:* "to deny the validity of") and may even vilify ("to lower in estimation or importance") the denial of what is true. Admittedly, it's hard to find the right words for saying that we should try to be nice to people, but the report from Lariano is particularly inept in its attempt. More substantive and more troubling, however, is the statement that "all should heal themselves from the obsession of converting others." An earnest desire to share the truth with others is a sickness? "Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!" declared St. Paul. Was he obsessed and in need of therapy? We all know the old saw about horses created by committees, but, even for a camel, the Lariano camel is embarrassingly odd.

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■ Every issue of the magazine elicits a raft of letters, relatively few of which can be published in the correspondence section. Others are sent to authors for their personal response, and I try to respond to everyone addressing what I have written. Sometimes a public clarification is in order. I am alerted to a possible misunderstanding of this passage in the June/July issue: "Once again, America is, as it always has been, an incorrigibly, confusedly, and conflictedly Christian society. There are relatively small minorities of Jews, Muslims, Hindus, and Buddhists. Of these, only Jews play a large role in our public discourse, although that could change in the future." I am told that this sounds "ominous," as though I am suggesting that Jews should not play such a large role. Of course, that is not what was intended. Jews are a declining proportion of the population, while the other minorities are increasing. It therefore seems more than possible that, in the decades ahead, those other voices, too, will have a large role in our public discourse. There is nothing necessarily ominous about that at all.

■ "Interestingly, many who urge more acceptance of religion in the public square want skeptics to keep quiet, and in fact if you actually go after someone's religious ideas you are quickly accused of anti-religious bias. I find this stance highly problematic. If the faithful are willing to say that we should shut up about their ideas because, after all, they are private, then the faithful should not proclaim the relevance of those ideas to public affairs." That's historian David Hollinger of the University of California, Berkeley, in a symposium on secularism published by *Religion in the News*. He's on to something. But then he goes wrong in thinking that it is only liberal secularists and liberal Christians who have an interest in making religious belief a matter of civil public discussion. In a 2004 article in *Harper's*, Hollinger wrote: "Religious ideas have become oddly privileged. Since most secularists consider religion a strictly private matter, they generally deem it impolite to express about a believer's religious ideas the kind of skepticism they might reveal in response to someone's notions about the economy or race or gender. Of course, there is no excuse for rudeness, yet the more impact on public affairs religious ideas are understood to have, the more troublesome this deference becomes. In an earlier era, freethinkers understood that the society in which they lived depended in part on the basic view of the world accepted by their fellow citizens—hence Robert Ingersoll and Elizabeth Cady Stanton not only defended a clear church-state separation but commented on the merits of specific religious ideas held by their contemporaries. For the last sixty or seventy years, however, secularists have more often supposed that the ideas of religious believers did not matter; that the ideas could be scorned when out of the earshot of the faithful or, in mixed company, could be patronizingly indulged the way one might listen to the words of a child or aged relative before tactfully changing the subject." Right again. He describes the presumption of atheism, or at least methodological atheism, in academic philosophy, and writes: "My point is not that philosophers should be more religious than they are—I want only to note that the discipline that once contributed precious analytic rigor to the evaluation of religious ideas rarely treats religion as a respectable rival to secular worldviews. In part, the shift reflects a striking and laudable change in the demographics of American academia after 1945. The integration of Jews into social science and humanities faculties ended the Protestant cultural hegemony of the leading colleges and created an atmosphere in which Christian ideas were no longer privileged; the liberation was a major enrichment of American intellectual life, and the philosophers, historians, literary scholars, and social scientists who participated in it were understandably reticent to turn their analytic powers towards Christian ideas in a society that had, until recently, excluded Jews as agents of 'de-Christianization.'" Hollinger singles out liberal secularists and liberal Catholics as the people who can bring about a new engagement of philosophy with religion. He has no more solid ally, however, than Pope Benedict XVI. The much-discussed September lecture in Regensburg was precisely an appeal to Western secularists to recognize that philosophy is crippled by its exclusion of the questions addressed by religion, and an appeal to Christians not to repudiate the Christian-Hellenic synthesis with its accent upon the mutual dependence of faith and reason. Hollinger thinks our intellectual culture would be healthier if we had today people such as Robert Ingersoll, a brilliant atheist who in the early twentieth century toured the country lambasting religion. (There is a plaque in honor of Ingersoll in Gramercy Park, around the corner from our office.) One hopes, however, that secularists could come up with people more sophisticated than Ingersoll, and more interested in truth than in scoring points, but Hollinger is right about the need to move beyond the "privileging" of religion as a purely personal concern grounded in private experience and therefore immune from criticism. Christianity makes public truth claims about reality, and such claims are subject to reasonable challenge, as they are also reasonably proposed. Whether Mr. Hollinger knows it or not, he and the pope are on the same side in contending against both ideological secularism and religious fideism.

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■ Born in Iran and now grateful to be an American, Cyrus Nowrasteh wrote the miniseries aired by ABC *The Road to 9/11*. You will remember that prominent Democrats demanded that the program be canceled because it portrayed President Clinton and his administration in an uncomplimentary light. (It was none too kind to the Bush team either.) But here is another dimension of the brouhaha. Nowrasteh writes: "The hysteria engendered by the series found more than one target. In addition to the death threats and hate mail directed at me, and my grotesque portrayal as a maddened right-winger, there developed an impassioned search for incriminating evidence on everyone else connected to the film. And in director David Cunningham, the searchers found pay dirt! His father had founded a Christian youth outreach mission. The whiff of the younger Mr. Cunningham's possible connection to this enterprise was enough to set the hounds of suspicion baying. A religious mission! A *New York Times* reporter wrote, without irony or explanation, that an issue that raised questions about the director was his involvement in his father's outreach work. In the era of McCarthyism, the merest hint of a connection to communism sufficed to inspire dark accusations, the certainty that the accused was part of a malign conspiracy. Today, apparently you can get something of that effect by charging a connection with a Christian mission." Another sobering thought for the day.

■ Paul Marshall is an evangelical and a senior fellow at Freedom House who plays an important part in keeping all of us alert to the realities of the persecution of believers, Christian and other, around the world. In "The Problem of the Prophets," published in *Christianity Today*, he reflects on evangelical political engagement. He says it is not true, as is sometimes claimed, that "evangelicals merely march to the drumbeat of Catholic thinkers." There is a very respectable stream of evangelical thought and history that informs, or should inform, Christian political action. But, he writes, "currently, evangelical activism hampers responsible political engagement by casually prooftexting the Bible and claiming the authority of Old Testament prophets." Moreover: "Evangelical activism has long shown bipolar characteristics. The Christian Coalition and the Moral Majority fit a historical pattern that begins with political passivity. Then, provoked by fear of secular intrusion, evangelicals launch a fervent crusade. Troops rally to a cause whose leaders employ military and salvation metaphors, calling for battles to 'save' America from apostasy. The crusade usually runs for several years, until the world's apparent resistance to reform leads to disappointment, occasionally degenerating into cynicism. Sometimes, evangelical activists even proclaim America's inevitable moral decline while calling for campaigns to arrest that decline." Then there are those who rather presumptuously present themselves as prophets: "A more pervasive—and perhaps pernicious—pattern makes a prophet the key political actor. This view's advocates implicitly claim the prophet's mantle for themselves. In his widely noted *God's Politics*, Jim Wallis writes, 'The place to begin to understand the politics of God is with the Prophets.' Wallis does not bother to justify this unusual contention. The Bible itself does not begin with the Prophets, but with Genesis, as does most Christian reflection on politics throughout history. Nor does Wallis relate the Prophets to the Torah. They challenged rulers on the basis of God's law, not on their own feelings of injustice.... These 'prophets' disregard the real, day-to-day problems faced by actual politicians. They present utopian societies to achieve, rather than guidance for governing the varied and brawling people politicians govern. It's as if parents received advice on rearing their children by hearing someone describe an ideal child. They might respond, 'I know what kids are supposed to be, but that tells me nothing. What I need is advice on what, today, I should do with the little monsters I have.'" Marshall's conclusion reflects what used to be called "Christian realism" until some theologians, disappointed by reality, debunked the term. Marshall writes: "This side of eternity there will be no 'revolution' that can change the human condition. The world will remain full of hope and sin, success and failure. We will win a few political debates and lose a few. Perhaps one day we'll lose many, and faithful people will be dragged to their deaths, as they are now around the world. With time, evangelicals will grow wiser about the political arena just as parents do—through lived, practical experience. That experience will deliver a dose of reality about what politics can and cannot accomplish. Political action will not deliver utopia, conquer sin, or change human nature. But it can make a difference between rampant crime and safe neighborhoods, between hungry families and economic security, between victory and defeat in war. And only those who have never been mugged, never been hungry, or never been at war will think these differences trivial."

■ A new Gallup Poll on attitudes toward ten different religious groups has Jews coming out on top (58 percent positive, 4 percent negative). Mormons are 28 and 29 percent, Muslims 26 and 30 percent, atheists 25 and 44 percent, and at the bottom, perhaps thanks to the efforts of Tom Cruise, Scientologists are 11 percent positive and 53 percent negative. Jews beat out Catholics, Presbyterians, evangelicals, and other much larger groups

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(they are a little less than 2 percent of the population). But Michael Medved suggests that Jewish enthusiasm should be tempered. First, people lie to polltakers. Who wants to admit that they're anti-Jewish or anti-Semitic? Then, too, Jews are uncontroversial, except for being Jews. On the hot-button moral and social issues, Jews are, from Reform to Orthodox, all over the map. Medved writes: "And that's the bad news for Jews behind the superficially flattering numbers in the Gallup Poll: People across the country rate Judaism positively not because the messages of our faith come across with so much strength and influence in our society, but because those teachings seem so confused, uncertain, and obscure. In this context, the nearly invisible negative reactions to Judaism (only 1 percent 'very negative' and 3 percent 'somewhat negative') provide evidence of our religion's problems, not our vitality. Any faith community that's speaking out on the issues of the day in a clear, firm voice, or displaying the sort of dynamism and ambition capable of drawing numerous new adherents, will end up offending some people and inspiring occasional negative responses. For many of us who have tried to revitalize the traditional faith components of American Jewish identity, it would be well worth it to accept a 'very negative' rating higher than a mere 1 percent in return for a religious message that was more compelling, competitive, and challenging—enough so to inspire both favorable and unfavorable reactions that counted as more informed and impassioned." One is reminded of the Jew who said, "Woe to you when all men speak well of you."

■ Mark Judge, who has written a provocative book titled *God and Man at Georgetown Prep: How I Became a Catholic Despite 20 Years of Catholic Schooling*, alerts me to his alma mater's understanding of Jesuit education, posted on the school's website: "Georgetown Preparatory School is committed to the Jesuit vision of education, which grows from two deeply grounded theological roots. The first is the conviction that God is found in all things. As Jesuit poet Gerard Manley Hopkins wrote: 'The world is charged with the grandeur of God.' Even the secular is sacred, from the Jesuit point of view. Clearly, then, the ardent pursuit of knowledge is not just an intellectual activity, but a supremely sacred process. From this conviction springs the second root of Jesuit education: that learning is a catalyst for conversion. By 'conversion' we do not mean joining a particular religion or advocating a certain creed. Conversion in the Jesuit context means a profound change in one's point of view—coming to see something from a totally different perspective. This is a solidly Christian concept, but it is also a universal one. It was the Buddha who said, when asked if he believed in miracles, 'A change of heart is a genuine miracle.'" Nothing there about Jesus Christ or the doctrine of the Catholic Church, and I suppose a profound change in one's point of view from Christianity to another religion counts as a conversion. Why are you not surprised?

■ Secretary of State of the Holy See does not mean what is often thought. He is indeed in charge of foreign policy, too, but he is the chief administrative officer, under the pope, of the entire Vatican. Tarcisio Cardinal Bertone is the new secretary of state recently appointed by Pope Benedict. He reflects on economic justice and international development in an interview with an Italian newspaper. The experts in institutions such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, he says, are frequently guilty of imposing statist solutions on poor countries that undermine both economic development and cultural freedom. The alternative? "Based on the social doctrine of the Church, we need a popular democratic capitalism, as well as a system of economic liberty which does not amount to an oligopoly, which makes room for the greatest number of participants possible, giving them a chance to engage in enterprise and creativity, favoring a healthy competition within a clear legal framework." That's a splendidly succinct summary of key points in John Paul II's 1991 encyclical on the free and just society, *Centesimus Annus*.

■ It's a little thing but it pulls together so much. Advanced Cell Technology (ACT), an outfit on the cutting edge of the culture of death, puts on a full-court media press touting its putative discovery of a new way of getting embryonic stem cells without killing embryos. *Nature* magazine plays it up big. The *New York Times* bites and runs it as the lead story, written by its chief science editor, on the front page. Knowledgeable critics immediately jump into the fray, pointing out that the technology is not new, that in fact all the embryos used in the experiment were killed, and that the President's Council on Bioethics had considered the ACT procedure a year earlier and unanimously rejected it as unethical. A few days later, down on a deep inside page, the *Times* has a story reporting that the Conference of Catholic Bishops brought pressure on the editors of *Nature*, who then apologized for their error. There is no acknowledgment of the *Times'* error in promoting ACT's fraudulent claims. Out of the paper's journalistic sloppiness the editors manage to rescue the satisfaction of once again suggesting that the Church is the enemy of scientific progress. What would we do without the nation's newspaper of record? Don't ask.

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■ Elie Wiesel's *Night*, first published in this country in 1960, has been for innumerable readers their first introduction to Holocaust literature. It is a compelling narrative of human devastation seen through the eyes of a Jewish child in the death camps. Many will recall the account of the Nazis' hanging of a young boy. The hanging is botched and the boy slowly strangles to death as he dangles by the rope. The question is asked, "Where is God?" And Wiesel answers, "Where is He? This is where—hanging here from this gallows." That scene, and that answer, has had a powerful influence also in Christian thought. Fr. Thomas Weinandy critically evaluates that influence in his splendid article "Does God Suffer?" in the November 2001 issue of FIRST THINGS.

■ Christopher Leighton, a Presbyterian with long experience in Jewish-Christian relations, is worried about the message of *Night*. Because the action all takes place within the death camps, he fears Christians will not be confronted by the source of evil in the society and the regime, which included many Christians, outside the camps. But mainly Leighton is worried that Christians will appropriate the story, including the death of the young boy, in support of the Christian narrative of redemption. Francois Mauriac, the noted Catholic thinker who wrote the foreword to the French edition of *Night*, did just that. He wrote: "Did I explain to [Wiesel] that what had been a stumbling block for *his* faith had become the cornerstone for *mine*? And that the connection between the cross and human suffering remains, in my view, the key to the unfathomable mystery in which the faith of his childhood was lost?" This is precisely the wrong Christian response, Leighton contends:

> The tortured screams of those children and their parents did not mend the world. Nor was theirs a sacrificial offering that can reestablish the bonds of intimacy between God and humanity. Any effort to squeeze the Jewish community's pain into a Christian paradigm compounds the original violence with another layer of violation. Indeed, the domestication of Jewish pain by means of comparison with Jesus' execution indicates a failure on the part of Christians to understand the mystery at the heart of the crucifixion. . . . Differently stated, an encounter with the Holocaust brings Christians face to face with the limits of their own theological prowess, compelling them to reexamine the claim that new life invariably follows in the wake of death. If they decline the challenge, they will read and interpret Weisel's *Night* in ways that simply reaffirm what they have always known. They will learn nothing from the encounter either about others or about themselves.

■ There is considerable merit to Leighton's argument, which appeared in a recent issue of *Commentary*. Certainly, it is no part of Christian faith that "new life invariably follows in the wake of death." That is rank sentimentalism. And yet, the perception of Mauriac and others that God is the boy dangling at the end of the rope in analogy with God in Christ bearing the weight of all human suffering on the cross is profoundly and irrepressibly Christian. It is not helpful to say that this is a "domestication" of Jewish suffering, or of the sufferings beyond number borne by others in the course of human history. On the Jewish side, the esteemed Michael Wyschogrod has probed the connections between the travails of the Jews and the Christian understanding of redemptive suffering. Such matters touch on mysteries that surpass our understanding and must be explored with great precision. Leighton is right to caution against a facile incorporation of Jewish suffering into the Christian story. Yet there is a deep sense in which that suffering is also ours and is included in the redemptive suffering of Christ. This question came in for rough headline treatment some years ago in the controversy over the Carmelite monastery at the edge of Auschwitz. Some Jews protested that the Church was trying to "Christianize the Holocaust." Yet Christians cannot help but say that the redemptive suffering of Christ is universal and comprehensive. Jewish suffering is indeed different, in that Jews and Judaism have a most particular and intimate connection with the Christian narrative of salvation. For Christians, the Jewish experience is not entirely "other." It is not too much to say that there are two Judaisms; the one is called Judaism and the other is called Christianity. Christianity and rabbinic Judaism are the two forms assumed by Judaism following the destruction of the Second Temple. The dispute that divides us, the dispute that may not be definitively resolved until the End Time, is over the question "Who is the Christ?" So Leighton is right in cautioning Christians against viewing the Holocaust "in ways that simply reaffirm what they have always known." As Mauriac is also right in seeing that Wiesel's stumbling block is, for Christians, the cornerstone.

■ The *Wall Street Journal* takes a sympathetic view of Rep. Walter Jones' proposal that the IRS permit churches and religious leaders to endorse political candidates without imperiling their tax exemption. Frances Kissling of Catholics for a Free Choice and the Rev. C. Welton Gaddy of the Interfaith Alliance write to take strong exception. Kissling's is a letterhead organization with the sole purpose of countering the Church's teaching on abortion and related life issues. It is more aptly described as anti-Catholic rather than

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Catholic. Interfaith Alliance is part of a Democratic alliance trying to counter the influence of the nefarious "religious right." So to suggest that they are nonpartisan is more than a bit of a stretch. Nonetheless, consider the argument on its merits. The Rev. Gaddy writes, "If the Jones bill is enacted into law, congregations all over America will be torn apart over partisan politics. Please let us continue to choose our houses of worship based on theology, not on party politics." Congregations will be torn apart only if their leaders are foolish enough to make party politics a condition of religious participation. Nothing in the Jones bill would require them to do that, but the constitutionally guaranteed free exercise of religion allows churches to do very foolish things. The government has no competence—as in authority or wisdom—to regulate religion. In the words of the First Amendment, Congress shall "make no law respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof." IRS rules, which are regulatory law under the authority of the Congress, clearly prohibit the free exercise of religion by tax-exempt churches that believe—wrongly, in my view—that their religious mission includes the endorsement of political candidates. I'm somewhat ambivalent about the Jones bill. Existing IRS rules—despite the fuzzy line between endorsement and exercising other forms of political influence—serve as a modest check on the corruption of religion by political partisanship. But then, protecting religion from its own corruption is no part of the legitimate business of this government.

■ "Defining deviancy down," a fine phrase coined by the late Pat Moynihan, takes many forms. We increasingly witness the process of defining moderation down. Ian Markham, dean of Hartford Seminary in Connecticut, takes me to task in *The Tablet* for being so concerned about Muslim Jihadists whose purpose—repeatedly declared and lethally demonstrated—is to destroy the West. He acknowledges that there are also extreme views on, as it were, the other side, noting the book by David Ray Griffin of Claremont Graduate School, published by John Knox Press, *Faith and the Truth Behind 9/11.* Griffin is in the company of radical revisionists who contend that the Twin Towers were destroyed by the United States in a conspiracy organized by the dark forces controlling George W. Bush. Markham writes, "Thousands of people in leftist organizations are being persuaded of this—in my view—implausible conspiracy theory." Markham, being a very moderate fellow, thinks the theory implausible, but wants it understood that that is only his personal view. He thus positions himself as a spokesman for the "serious center." He deplores my writings on Jihadism as "deeply insensitive pastorally" and declares, "I stand alongside my Muslim colleagues and students and challenge this culture of misunderstanding and suspicion." As it happens, Osama bin Laden and his colleagues are not in my pastoral charge, and when they say they are out to destroy the civilization to which I am devoted—and convincingly demonstrate that they mean it—the appropriate response is not pastoral sensitivity but prudent defense. As for Mr. Markham's colleagues and students, I have never said a word about them, assuming, as I do, that they are not Jihadists plotting to kill us. It is well known that Hartford Seminary is a center of moderation where one is perfectly free to believe that the Bush administration did not direct the attack of September 11.

■ I once got into a lot of trouble when, writing on the judicial usurpation of politics in these pages, I said we should be concerned about the possibility that many Americans might one day conclude that the motto "God and country" has been changed to the question "God *or* country." Now comes an alarming finding from a poll by the Pew Research Center. At least it greatly alarms David Van Biema, who, writing in *Time* magazine, senses theocracy on the march. Pew asked 820 self-identified Christians, "Do you think of yourself first as American or as Christian?" Forty-two percent answered "Christian first" and 48 percent answered "America first"; 7 percent didn't answer. Now "self-identified Christian" is not a terribly useful category, since that includes close to 90 percent of the population. One would like to know a little more about the level of their Christian belief and practice. Nonetheless, it is interesting to note that 62 percent of those who described themselves as evangelicals said "Christian first," while Catholics and oldline Protestants went 62 and 65 percent, respectively, for "American first." This might suggest that evangelicals are less prone to the idolatry of nationalism than are Catholics and oldline Protestants. Or, to put it differently, that evangelicals better understand that, in the long tradition of Christian fidelity, including martyrdom, allegiance to Christ *of course* takes priority over any other allegiance. But that, too, might be misleading. The term *evangelical*, as it has come to be used in recent decades, denotes a specific faith commitment and, increasingly, a positioning of oneself in the ongoing culture wars. By contrast, *Catholic* and *Protestant* (even if one specifies mainline Protestant) is often a religio-cultural identifier including many people who are just happen-to-be-by-background members. In other words, if someone says he is an evangelical, he is probably saying what he himself believes and practices. If someone says he is a Catholic or a Presbyterian, he may simply be indicating the religious community into which he was born.

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(If evangelicalism is around in its present form fifty or a hundred years from now, there will no doubt be a lot of happen-to-be evangelicals.) The pity in all this is that only 42 percent of those who identify themselves as Christian seem to understand the priority of a Christian's allegiance to Christ and his Church. But, as I say, Mr. Van Biema finds that 42 percent figure cause for alarm. He asks us to engage in a "thought experiment." Would we not be alarmed if 42 percent of 820 Muslim-Americans, when asked, "Do you think of yourself first as American or as Muslim?" responded that they are "Muslims first." Well yes, some people would be alarmed because they know very little about Muslims and Islam and do not understand that *of course* a Muslim's first allegiance is to Allah. But the symmetry Mr. Van Biema suggests in his thought experiment is profoundly misleading. Muslims in this country are a small minority of no more than 2 percent, most of them relatively recent arrivals, and are associated with a religion in whose name, however illegitimately, war has been declared against America. Quite understandably, many, if not most, Americans think that Muslim allegiance to America is at least a fair question. Christians, on the other hand, are the overwhelming majority who share a Christian tradition, broadly defined, with those who settled the country, who devised its constitutional order, and who have over almost three centuries given definition to what it means to be an American. It is perfectly understandable that Christians may think that they know what it means to be an American in a way that many or most Muslims may not know. What Mr. Van Biema does not know, at least to judge by his essay in *Time*, is the political, cultural, and religious reality of America, both past and present. He is clear enough, however, about the ordering of his own allegiances. He says he's going to get himself an "American First" bumper sticker. One may reasonably suppose that that means he is not a Christian or, if he happens to be a Christian, not a very serious Christian. Or perhaps he is just terribly confused.

■ When, a little more than year ago, Brother Roger Schutz of the Taizé community was, at age 90, fatally stabbed, news stories appeared saying that he had years earlier surreptitiously "converted" to Catholicism from the Reformed Protestant communion to which he belonged. Now Taizé has officially responded to those stories in a press release. "From a Protestant background, Brother Roger undertook a step that was without precedent since the Reformation: entering progressively into a full communion with the faith of the Catholic Church without a 'conversion' that would imply a break with his origins." In 1980, during a meeting in Rome in the presence of Pope John Paul II, Brother Roger said, "I have found my own identity as a Christian by reconciling within myself the faith of my origins with the mystery of the Catholic faith, without breaking fellowship with anyone." The Taizé statement ends with this: "Those who at all costs want the Christian denominations each to find their own identity in opposition to the others can naturally not grasp Brother Roger's aims. He was a man of communion, and that is perhaps the most difficult thing for some people to understand." John Paul II apparently considered Brother Roger to be in full communion with the Catholic Church, and the pope is the final authority on such matters. It is not unprecedented, but it is very unusual, that one is received into full communion without a formal rite of reception. One may reasonably assume that Brother Roger abjured, at least in his own mind, those parts of the Reformed tradition that preclude being in full communion with Rome. When I was received into full communion, I said of my earlier Lutheranism, "Nothing that was good is rejected; all is fulfilled." I expect that that is the way in which we ought to understand the case of Brother Roger. Most Catholics and others will continue to describe this as "conversion," and that should not be a big problem. The whole of the Christian life is, or should be, a continuing conversion to the fullness of Christ and his Church.

■ Nobody would want to deny the charms of Barbados, although it is not the Institute for Regenerative Medicine (IRM) that usually comes to mind in that connection. IRM claims that it is making Barbados the "Embryonic Stem Cell Capital of the World." The institute imports parts of babies, mainly from Ukraine, who were aborted at six to twelve weeks, liquefies them into a baby puree, and injects the mix into customers, who pay $25,000 per shot. The procedure takes no more than an hour or two, and the website of IRM (www.regenmd.com) includes glowing testimonials of clients who claim relief from everything from arthritis to troubled bowels and poor skin texture. Erectile dysfunction, too. Of course the morally scrupulous may be made uneasy by the procedure, but what's the point of letting all those human body parts go to waste? The answer to that has never been self-evident to everyone. I note that *Webster's* says that the word *cannibalism* is of Caribbean origin.

■ "Few would argue there are direct parallels between the current assaults on liberals in academe and McCarthyism. Unlike the McCarthy era, most threats to academic freedom—real or perceived—do not, yet, involve the state." Not *yet.* A long special report in Britain's leftward *Guardian* depicts a grim picture in

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which American professors, and even grade school teachers, are being challenged for, among other things, comparing George W. Bush with Adolf Hitler and excoriating the Jewish lobby for its control of U.S. foreign policy. Some of these teachers have even received threatening emails! Toward the end of the story, it is allowed that the American academy is liberal and that protests against liberal excesses come from only a handful of individuals. But the account concludes by quoting a professor who says, "There's a pre-written script you have to follow and if you choose not to follow it, then there are consequences, so you become very self-conscious about what you say. . . . Everybody is looking over their shoulders." It sounds like McCarthyism to me. Although there is something to be said for professors being self-conscious about what they say.

■ I have written before about R.S. Thomas, but Anthony Daniels writes about him better than I. This is from the *New Criterion*:

> But the tutelary literary spirit of modern North Wales is the great poet R.S. Thomas, who died aged eighty-seven in 2000. He was a strange figure, an Anglican priest who was a Welsh nationalist, fierce to the point of condoning violence and even murder, an angry man who half-believed in God without appearing to like Him very much, a lyric poet who had few illusions about the harshness of nature, a man who wrote his poetry in his mother-tongue, English, but sometimes refused to speak it to visitors who knew no Welsh (the great majority of them, after all), to pay them back for the persecution, or rather petty humiliations, that Welsh-speakers had suffered over the years, even though it was highly unlikely that any of them were personally responsible for those humiliations. He made generalizations about the English that, if he had made them about practically any other group, would have landed him in court on a charge of incitement to racial hatred, while he berated the Welsh for their insufficiently militant nationalism, supinely preferring their own individual material advancement and comfort to the cause. He was like an Old Testament prophet, who waxed exceedingly, though somewhat indiscriminately, wrathful. Humanity didn't please him.

Thomas could be affirmative, as they say, about life. There is this:

> *I have seen the sun break through*
> *to illuminate a small field*
> *for a while, and gone my way*
> *and forgotten it. But that was the pearl*
> *of great price, the one field that had*
> *the treasure in it. I realize now*
> *that I must give all that I have*
> *to possess it. Life is not hurrying*
>
> *on to a receding future, nor hankering after*
> *an imagined past. It is the turning*
> *aside like Moses to the miracle*
> *of the lit bush, to a brightness*
> *that seemed as transitory as your youth*
> *once, but is the eternity that awaits you.*

But mainly, writes Daniels, there is the vulgarity and waste that enraged Thomas. "In a time of the deepest superficiality, if I may put it thus, he comes like a prophet crying in the wilderness." He may well put it thus.

■ Catherine de Hueck Doherty was a most remarkable woman who founded a community of laypeople and priests known as Madonna House. Their main place is in Combermere, Ontario, close to my childhood home, so I feel a special connection with them. Fr. Robert Wild, who is postulator for Catherine's cause (meaning he's leading the effort to have her declared a saint), sends me an entry from her journal, dated May 3, 1939: "Off to Times Square to meet Dorothy Day for lunch. Went to Child's. Had a lovely visit with her. Always consider her wonderful, more convinced than ever that she is a saint. What a joy to be with her. She shines with an inward light that no one can suppress. Her difficulties are as mine—mostly with the human beings and their blindness and self-love—and ability to put second things first." I confess that my difficulties as well are mostly with human beings. And especially with those who don't put first things first.

■ Gordon Wood again, this time in the *New York Review of Books,* where he discusses recent literature on religion and the American founding, including Jon Meacham's *American Gospel: God, the Founding Fathers, and the Making of a Nation*. Despite the current chatter about the threat of theocracy, Wood writes, "There is no religious establishment here and not much formal connection between religion and government; in fact, over the past generation there has been an almost obsessive concern to keep religion apart from the public culture and affairs of the state." Wood debunks—as so many others have, to limited effect in our public discourse—the notion that the First Amendment was intended to separate religion from public life. Established religions continued in the states well into the nineteenth century. Religious tolerance was forced by religious pluralism. "The presence of many different sects within the same community slow-

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ly and begrudgingly compelled people into toleration." Wood takes sharp issue with the gist of Meacham's argument that we can end our present confusions and conflicts by "recovering the sense and spirit of the Founding era." The founding era, Wood contends, was very unlike our own. He is also impatient with the constant appeals to "the separation of church and state," the famous phrase in Jefferson's letter to the Baptists of Danbury, Connecticut, which received secular sacralization, so to speak, in the Supreme Court's *Everson* decision of 1947. That decision "set in motion a series of ever more confusing decisions over the next sixty years as the Supreme Court struggled to maintain this wall of separation. The Court has labored to define what is permissible and what is impermissible in what has become an increasingly capricious relationship between church and state." The wall of separation was not the main point of Jefferson's letter, and he intended it only as a temporary disposition until the realization of his hope that, as he wrote in 1822, "there is not a *young man* now living in the United States who will not die an Unitarian." The separation of church and state, if one must use that phrase, is not the product of constitutional law or Jeffersonian deism but of the religious situation itself. "The principal source of our separation of church and state was never enlightened rationalism, important as that is to us today, but rather growing realization by the various competing religious groups that it was better to neutralize the state in matters of religion than run the risk of one of their opponents gaining control of the government." As we must never tire of explaining, the "no establishment" provision of the First Amendment is entirely in the service of the "free exercise of religion." Wood's instructive essay only indirectly addresses the very different circumstance today in which the lines of suspicion and hostility are less and less between competing religious groups and more and more between publicly assertive religion in response to publicly assertive secularism. But that is for another time.

■ A while back I chided the Augustinians of Villanova University for insisting that people stand rather than kneel during the Mass. A distinguished theologian writes to take me to task for not recognizing that the fathers there are the true traditionalists. He notes that in the patristic era and still today in the Orthodox Church, the practice is to stand, not kneel. "I bring this to your attention only to point out that it is kneeling and not standing which is a liturgical innovation in the West," he writes. True enough, and one might well wish that the Eucharist in the West were typically celebrated with the majesty and solemnity of the Divine Liturgy found among many Orthodox. For well over a millennium, however, liturgical reverence in the West has been associated with kneeling. Generations of piety, devotion, and catechesis have been significantly formed by that bodily gesture of adoration and prayer. To speak of kneeling as an "innovation" is a clever academic point but, if I may be permitted to say so, suggests a certain contempt for the lived spiritual experience of Catholics beyond numbering over the centuries and still today. As far as I know, the Augustinians of Villanova are of the Latin Rite. Kneeling, in the West, is now the tradition, and the insistence of some liturgists and pastors that everybody must stand is the innovation. The much-publicized battles over this question in some parishes and dioceses is a pastoral scandal created by an authoritarian clericalism that reflects a fundamental lack of respect for the lived experience and piety of the People of God—the very thing that, in other contexts, the innovators claim to champion.

■ The socialist journal *New Politics* has a special section on religion in its Winter 2006 edition. Harvey Cox of Harvard Divinity School is hopeful about the possibility of forming an alliance between religion and the left. While the religious right is dominant in this country, and the left can no longer count on Jews and Blacks, he sees promising developments in Asia and is heartened by the peace activism of a Buddhist group called Soka Gakkai. In this country, he looks to organized labor and is encouraged by the Chicago-based Interfaith Committee for Worker Justice. (Apart from government employees, about 7 percent of American workers belong to labor unions.) Other contributors are more skeptical about an alliance with religion, and some think it is as unlikely as it is bad. In his article, French philosopher Michael Onfray calls for a revival of the work of the seventeenth century atheist priest and philosopher Jean Meslier, who, like Onfray, was militantly anti-Christian. The concluding essay by Chris Rhoades Dykema says religion is "essentially male-dominant, ascetic, misogynist, and anti-democratic." He places his hope in "changing family structure" that leads inevitably to further secularization and makes religion a nonissue. I don't know whether *New Politics* is read by the folks at the religion outreach office of the Democratic National Committee.

■ It is a year since Rome's Congregation for Education issued the instruction that men with "deep-seated" homosexual tendencies should not be admitted to seminary or ordained to priesthood. In "Homosexuality and Religious Life," James Arbor, who has been a professed religious for forty years, makes a vigorous argument that the same rule should apply to religious

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communities. Writing in *The Priest*, which is published by *Our Sunday Visitor*, he says, "Although there are celibate and chaste homosexuals in almost every congregation who have served the Church in a variety of ways, I believe that it is unjust to invite a man who is sexually attracted to men into an all-male environment or a woman who is sexually attracted to women into an all-female environment. It is unjust to the individual and to the religious community. It puts the individual in grave danger of personal moral and spiritual collapse and it risks profoundly corrupting the dynamics and life of the religious community." He goes on to detail the ways in which homosexual attractions lead to cliques, patterns of favoritism, and deep-seated resentments that undermine community life. His final line is this: "Once the laity becomes convinced that a community is simply a gay commune, the effective evangelical witness of that community comes to an end." Arbor's argument deserves careful reading. As for the instruction of last November 29, it is not easy to assess its influence. Some influential commentators, with Jesuits conspicuous among them, have publicly and explicitly rejected the instruction. With few exceptions, bishops have been silent. It is possible that Rome will address the question again when the Congregation for Education has finished working through the reports from the recent visitation of U.S. seminaries.

■ Entertainment worship is big business. There is, unsurprisingly, even a slick publication called *Church Production Magazine*. A big advertiser is "EasyWorship Multimedia Software." Happy are they who are at ease in Zion, as the prophet did not say. And an article on "The Fundamentals of Prosumer Video Camera Operation." One can imagine what the early-twentieth-century authors of *The Fundamentals* might think. The lead piece is on Hope Community Church in Raleigh, North Carolina. "If we expect to reach our culture we must keep up with them technically. Our neighbors and friends who are far from God are used to surround-sound movies in HD and state of the art lighting at live concerts and shows they attend. We want our congregation to bring their friends and not have them turned off because we seem antiquated in our methodology. I would beg the leadership not to skimp in the area of A/V equipment." One can just hear a friend or neighbor saying, "Almost I would be a Christian, but that A/V equipment is *so* 2004." The writer admits that the best in A/V and lighting is costly, even extravagant. "It is as extravagant as the perfume that was poured on our Lord's feet and Jesus said of her, 'Wherever the Good News is preached throughout the world, this woman's deed will be talked about in her memory' (Matthew 26:13). Don't be frivolous, but why not be extravagant for God? He deserves our best." Keeping God happy "technically" cannot be done on the cheap. ZFX is big in the entertainment worship industry and "has proudly assisted in the awe-inspiring finale of many passion plays with the ascension of Jesus to Heaven. We have also added flying angels to numerous Living Christmas Trees. . . . Let us assist you in retelling the greatest story ever told." You say these people are sincere, and I regret to say you're right. But it's impressive. Consider what ZFX did for Southeast Christian Church in Louisville, Kentucky. "We added two flying angels that descended from the ceiling high above. . . . The angels needed 30 feet of lift to travel the full length of the flying tracks. This was not possible with the flying equipment provided by their previous vendor." For the Annunciation, the director "wanted Gabriel to continually face Mary as he sang to her and moved around the stage. ZFX custom built a radio controlled apparatus that allowed him to rotate and face any direction during his flight." The audience cheered. And the angels wept.

■ Is neoconservatism Jewish? There is no doubt that the movement, if that is what it is, is largely composed of Jewish liberals who were, in Irving Kristol's phrase, mugged by reality. In any event, that is the focus of Murray Friedman's *The Neoconservative Revolution: Jewish Intellectuals and the Shaping of Public Policy*, reviewed by Wilfred McClay in *Commentary*. Becoming a neoconservative meant revolting against tribal norms. McClay writes: "There is nothing exclusively Jewish about this experience, either. But for individual Jews, especially those still likely to perceive themselves as marginal in American culture, such a revolt could not help being especially daunting. It meant challenging not only the status quo within the safe havens of academia, where many had congregated, but also the near-universal assumptions of American Jewish life itself, assumptions that had come to be seen, however wrongly, as the essence of Jewish identity. Even the espousal of anticommunism, not to mention an openly favorable view of capitalism, carried a special price for Jews, given the intensity with which the socialist ideal was exalted in American Jewish thought. So, too, given the strong American Jewish identification with the cause of civil rights, did the willingness to break from liberal ranks on issues of race. And so did the willingness to make common cause with conservative Christians in promoting a post-secular, post-separationist ethos that to secular liberal Jews has seemed nothing short of madness. Such conclusions have not been arrived at easily, and the existential weight entailed in

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acting on one's 'second thoughts' is a crucial part of the story. If there is anything Friedman's book demonstrates conclusively, it is the impossibility at this point of writing a definitive history of the neoconservative disposition. That is, in part, because it is still so visibly in motion. But as is true of so many characteristically American phenomena, it also defies simple categories of cultural analysis. Indeed, the difficulty of either completely affirming or completely denying the specifically Jewish character of neoconservatism may turn out to be one of its greatest assets—and another sign of its thoroughgoing Americanness."

■ A while back I commented with great appreciation on a Christmas card depicting the Blessed Virgin Mary comforting Eve. I mentioned that it was a marvelous and beautifully orthodox *novum* in the tradition of Christian art and poetry. Readers have been writing here and also to the sisters who produced the card wanting to buy copies. The picture on the card is by the youngest and the poem by the oldest sister of the community. The Abbess, Mother Gail Fitzpatrick, tells me they don't sell the card. But here's an idea (not suggested by Mother Gail): Make a generous donation and you might get on their Christmas card list. The address is Our Lady of the Mississippi Abbey, 8400 Abbey Hill Road, Dubuque, Iowa 52003.

■ We all have to cope with people who are eager to let you know how *very* accomplished or influential they are. This is occasioned by nobody in particular, but egregious claims to importance, and displays of self-importance, regularly bring to mind what is perhaps my favorite Chesterton poem, "The Donkey." (It is also a needed reminder for each of us in particular.)

When fishes flew and forests walked
And figs grew upon thorn,
Some moment when the moon was blood
Then surely I was born.

With monstrous head and sickening cry
And ears like errant wings,
The devil's walking parody
On all four-footed things.

The tattered outlaw of the earth,
Of ancient crooked will;
Starve, scourge, deride me: I am dumb,
I keep my secret still.

Fools! For I also had my hour;
One far fierce hour and sweet:
There was a shout about my ears,
And palms before my feet.

Sources: Regensburg, *Weekly Standard*, October 2. Philip Jenkins and the Gnostics, *Chesterton Review*, Fall/Winter 2004. Gordon Wood, NPR, February 20. Jim Wallis and spiritual progressives, *New York Times*, May 19. David Hollinger and secularism, *Harper's*, November 2004. Cyrus Nowrasteh and ABC, *Wall Street Journal*, September 18. Paul Marshall and evangelical politics, *Christianity Today*, September. Cardinal Bertone, *National Catholic Reporter*, August 11. Stem cells, *New York Times*, September 2. Jewish suffering, *Commentary*, May. Churches and the IRS, *Wall Street Journal*, September 6. Hartford Seminary, *Tablet*, September 9. America First, *Time*, August 31. Brother Roger, Taizé press release, September 14. McCarthyism and academe, *Guardian*, April 4. R.S. Thomas, *New Criterion*, May. Gordon Wood, *New York Review of Books*, June 8. Religion and politics, *New Politics*, June. Homosexuals in the priesthood, *The Priest*, March. Entertainment worship, *Church Production Magazine*, April. Jewish neoconservatism, *Commentary*, February.

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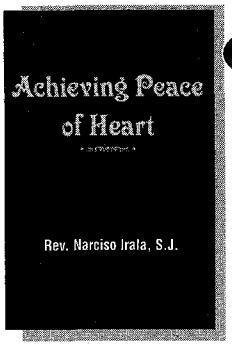

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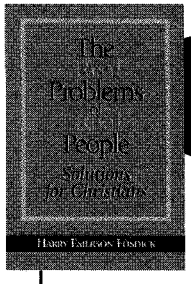

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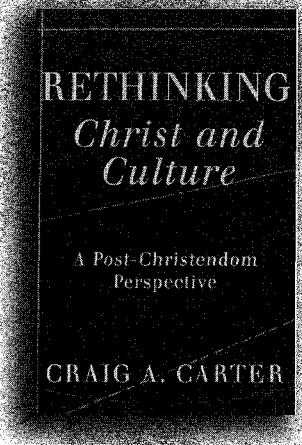

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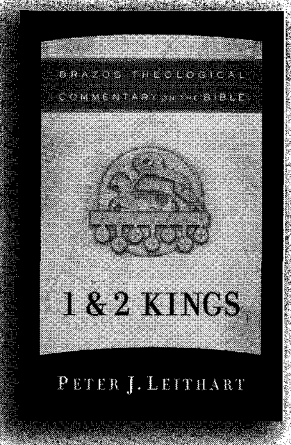

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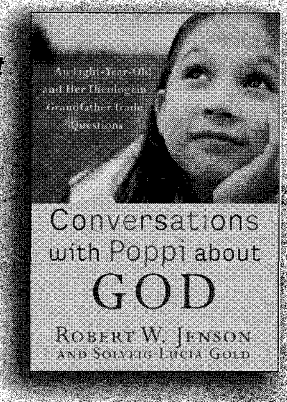

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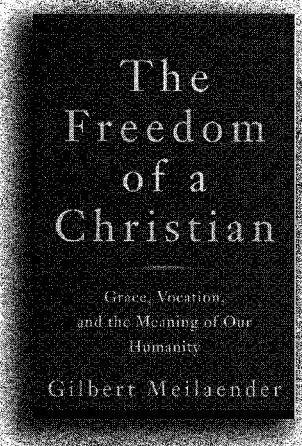

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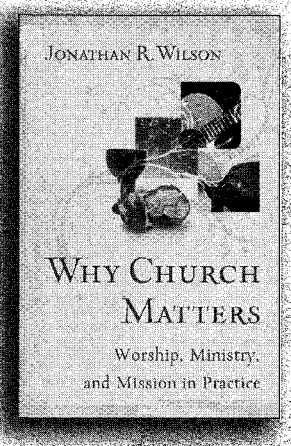

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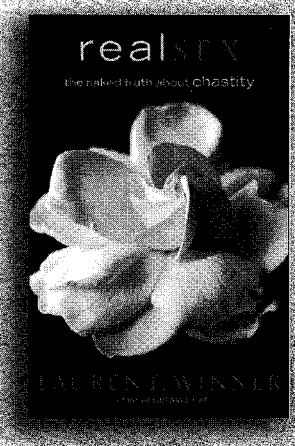

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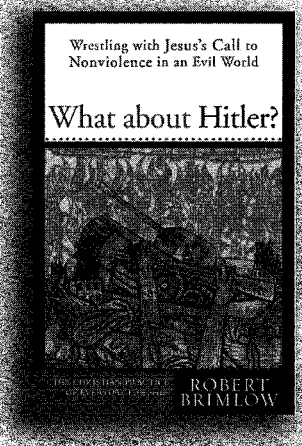

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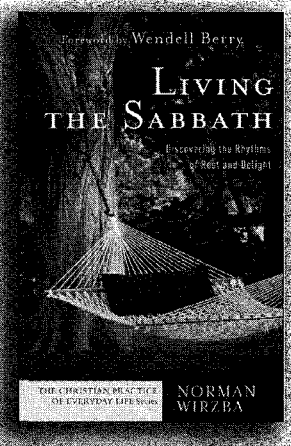

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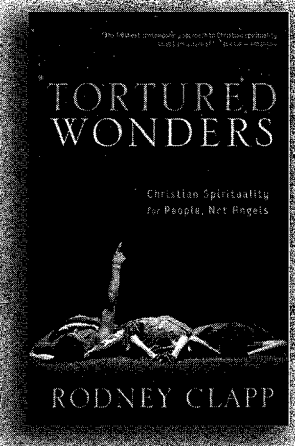

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